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www.derwenthoward.com.au

A WARM WELCOME

to Australia's best PC GAMES magazine

The first law of an Editor's page is to cheerily waffle about this issue's contents being the greatest thing since last issue's contents. But this month's preamble takes the rulebook and tears it up into a series of commemorative paperchains depicting the Battle of Balaclava. Uh-huh. That's right. Because this month we're talking about PC GAMES ADDICT of the future. We're currently undergoing 'redesign', which is a bit like cosmetic surgery for magazines. Without warning, an old friend disappears for a few days. When they come back, there's not a trace of bandages but they suddenly look a lot smoother, fitter and easier on the eye. This redesign process normally happens to most magazines every few years to keep them up to date. But PC GAMES ADDICT has endured remarkably well in its current form. We've somehow stuck with the same format since August 2002. That's a long time in magazines but even PCGA cannot withstand the winds of change forever. So behind the scenes we're putting every part of the mag under the microscope to work out what we can improve. The result should be a fresh new look and a magazine that reads better than ever. But just to make sure we don't make a Jackson's face of it, we'd like you, the readers to help out.

We're bursting with ideas that we think you'll like. We've also got a big sack of readers' ideas that we've collected but haven't had the chance to include before. But we want you to be more involved. Every month PCGA readers send us loads of new ideas and a lot of the mag is inspired by your suggestions. So it's only right that you play a major role in the biggest change to sweep the mag in years. If you've ever wanted something to change then this is our best chance to make it happen.

Now we can decide whether The Spy should be buried with honours, or the hardware section should be expanded ten-fold (well maybe not… that'd make us a hardware only magazine).

So tell us what you want to see. What content should be ditched? What new features should be introduced? What needs to be improved? Which sections chopped or enlarged? Write or e-mail us with your words of wisdom. Be quick though. Like Easter eggs and those woolly juniors that go well with mint sauce, the new look mag will bounce into action in Autumn or early Winter. And don't worry. These things usually work out well. We don't intend to change our writing style, turn into a console mag, remove the jokes (though maybe we should sometimes) or ditch the finest parts of our heritage. Nor will we disappear up our cakeholes and create a minimalist celebration of the colour white. We'll still be PC GAMES ADDICT… Just better.

MARK DONALD
EDITOR

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This month we give you the chance to check out our magnificent cover title, *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow.* Other demos include *Colin McRae Rally 04*, *Syberia 2*, *Gangland*, *Beyond Divinity*, *UFO Alien Invasion*, *Desert Rats vs. Afrika Korps* and even more for those of you holding a DVD version of the mag. To find out what else is there see page 95 for full details!

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PC GAMES addict
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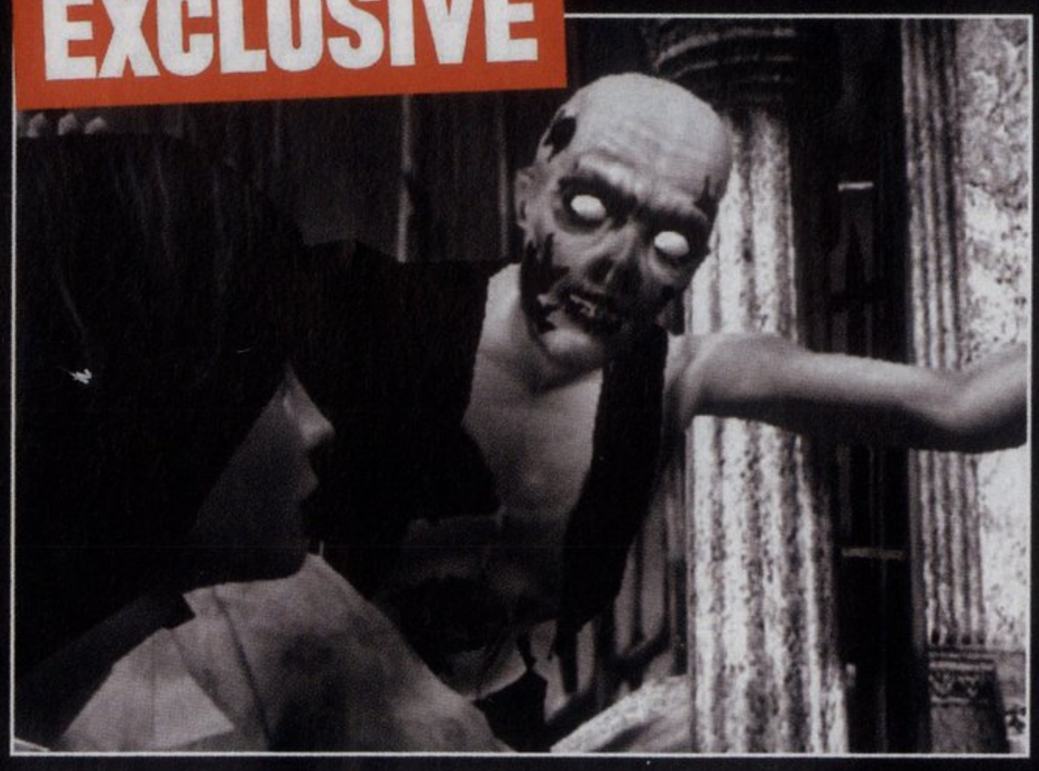
EXCLUSIVE
THE MOVIES



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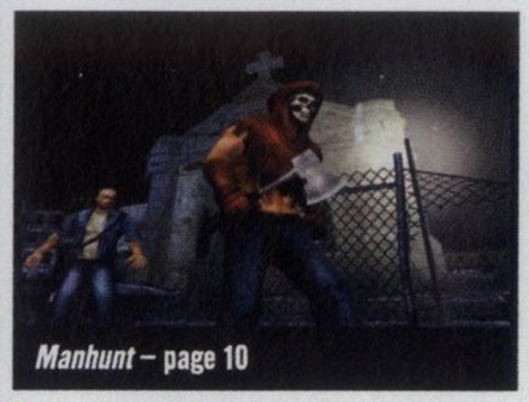

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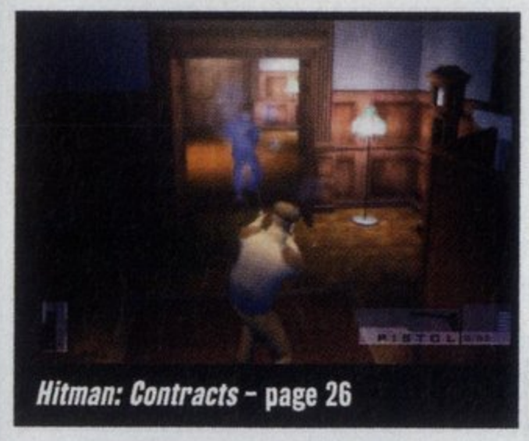

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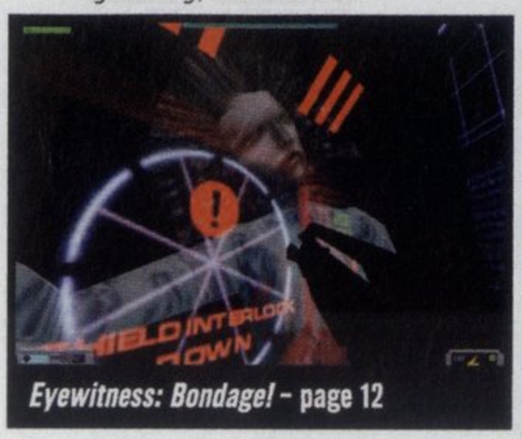

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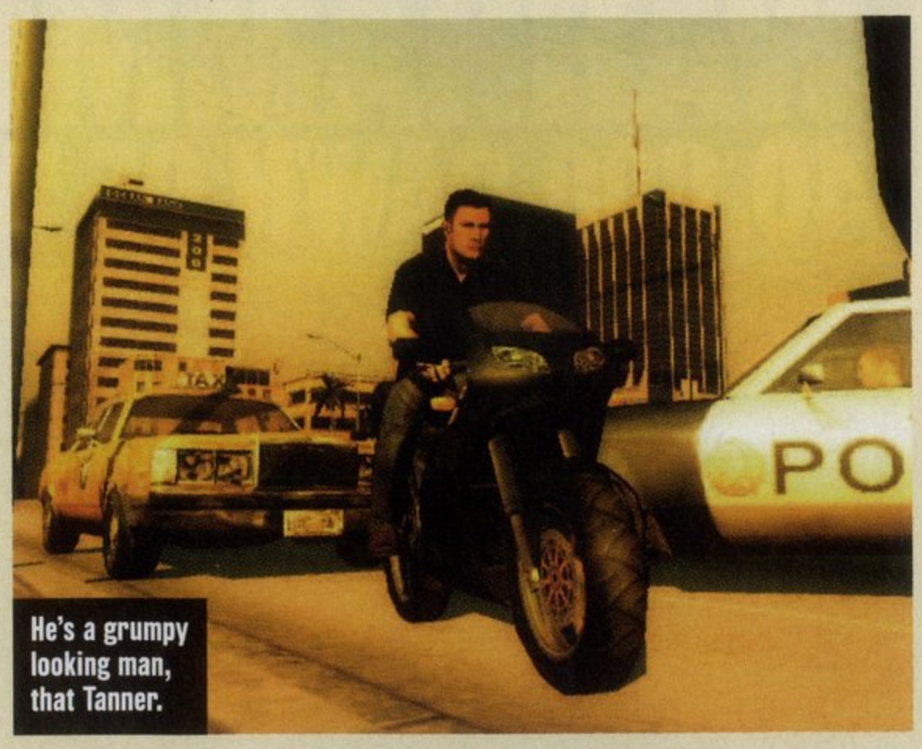
SCOOP! YOUR FIRST LOOK AT...

DRIVER 3

They want us to call it 'Driv3r'. When you prise our keyboards from our cold dead hands, Atari.

By TIM EDWARDS


He's a grumpy looking man, that Tanner.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

REFLECTIONS

Country UK
Established 1989
http://driver.gtgames.com/developer.html

Reflections rose to prominence with the release of *Shadow of the Beast*, one of the classic Amiga platform games. Along with Team 17 and Rockstar North, they form the core of Britain's northern development scene. They're famed for producing some of the most muscle-heavy car simulations around, from *Destruction Derby* to *Driver*, and the PS2-only *Stuntman*.

Previous Games:
Shadow of the Beast, Destruction Derby, Driver, Driver 2, Stuntman.

MICKEY Rourke has a tiny pet dog. That's the hot gossip from the *Driver 3* recording sessions, according to Martin Edmonson, the man responsible for bringing the latest in the *Driver* series to the small monitor. **The return of dirty cop Tanner is big news, bringing with it an enormous slice of Hollywood ambition. The *Driver* games have never been about *just* driving, they've always been about cinematic licence as well – about bringing studio ideals to the videogame world. Now, Hollywood has got the message: the poster reads 'Driver 3: Starring Michael Madsen, Mickey Rourke and Miami.'**

The original *Driver* was a revelation. It was the first 3D game to truly *get* what players wanted from the medium: to cause carnage and to act out their cinematic fantasies. A glorious sense of momentum and a fine cinematic eye were combined to create something genuinely startling: not a car race game, but a car *chase* game.

That was 1999. In five years, our expectations have grown exponentially. Hence, says Martin, the Hollywood talent. "We hired the actors to bring life to the characters. We have used 'voice artists' in the past but professional actors really *act* the lines rather than simply reading them. If you compare the placeholder voices with the final actors in our scenes the difference is considerable."

The globetrotting script is a homage to Gone in 60 Seconds. Playing as Tanner, you infiltrate a gang of car thieves, stealing from the young rich in Miami, and eventually shipping the illicit automobiles out to Russia. Along the way you'll get to visit Instanbul and Nice. Why choose these locations over, say, Parramatta? "Miami is very flat with wide open streets, giving the player lots of room to manoeuvre. Nice introduces some pretty extreme hills, which aside from being a huge visual change alters the balance and handling of the car. Istanbul introduces very narrow back streets and 'rat runs'. It's such an amazing city visually, far more interesting to explore than Parramatta, with rundown slums next to the most amazing temples and mosques." Now there's a man who's never navigated Sydney's glamorous Northwest by night.

"THE RETURN OF DIRTY COP TANNER IS BIG NEWS, BRINGING WITH IT AN ENORMOUS SLICE OF HOLLYWOOD AMBITION."

As proud as he is of the game's Hollywood values, Martin is just as proud of the lengths his team will go to to develop an accurate car simulation. "We model the entire chassis, sub-frame and cabin in addition to the body shell. Panels on the cars can bend and ultimately detach. What makes *Driver* different is that this is not just a graphical effect: they all have physical properties. For example, doors can be wrenched off on the corner of a building, or you can riddle any vehicle with bullet holes even if the car is dented out of all proportion." In a brilliant touch, *Driver 3* will feature a range of vehicles well beyond the usual. Expect to steer boats, motorbikes and a fully articulated 18 wheeler rig, with fully functional air horn. The latter will take further advantage of the new physics system: expect the trailer to buckle and weave precisely according to Newton's damnable laws.

Release Spring 2004

Parking in Miami proves no problem.

If you can't beat 'em, ram 'em.

COMING SOON!

Just as soon as we can convince Mark Donald we need to research Miami, Nice, and Instanbul in depth, that is. With someone else paying for the repairs.

- **Genre** Driving
- **Developer** Reflections
- **Publisher** Atari

YOU'LL CHASE DOWN *DRIVER 3* BECAUSE...

- You're already in love with *GTA: Vice City*.
- It will feature a level of Hollywood polish rarely seen in PC gaming.
- You choose the route and means of chase.
- Big rigs = big fun. It's that simple.

In the wild, bull automobiles will fight to the death for the right to mate with a female.

UPCLOSE MINI MIAMI

In the course of putting together the various locations, Reflections are having to construct idealised versions of real world places. That includes 156 miles of driveable road and an incredible 35,400 individually placed buildings. Each of these is textured from reference photographs and lovingly positioned for maximum visual impact. Those Miami sunsets don't do the visual aesthetics any harm, either.

Obstacles prove no obstacle for Nice drivers.

SCOOP! YOUR FIRST LOOK AT...

MANHUNT

Death becomes you.

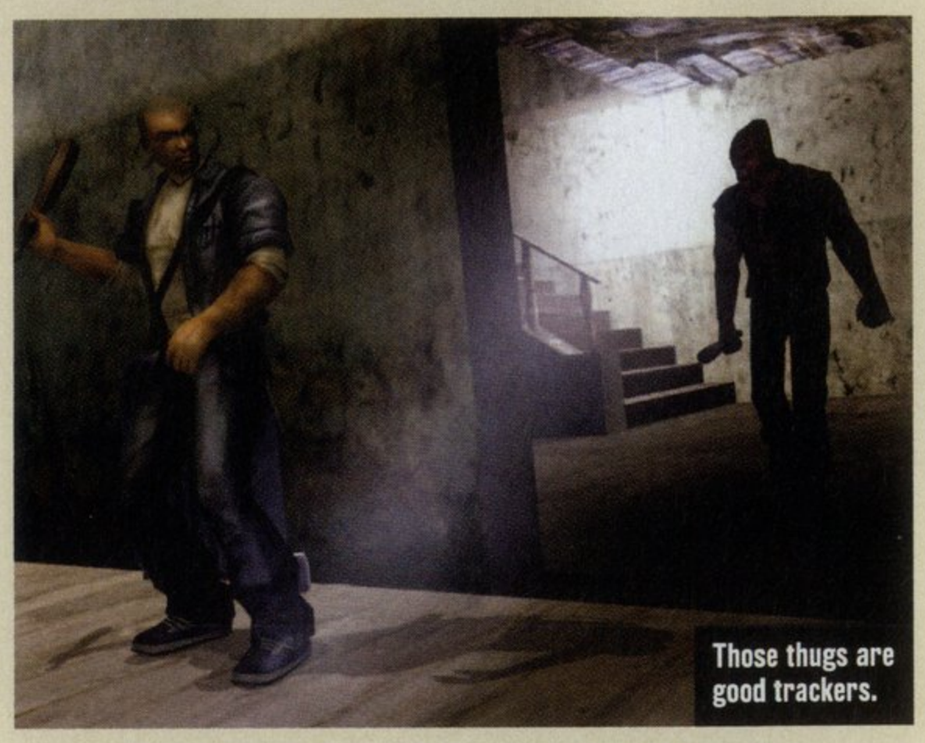
By CRAIG PEARSON

WHEN *Vice City* **hit the shelves, the questionable morality it revelled in sent shockwaves through the mainstream press. We, on the other hand, loved it. Rockstar created something capable of entertaining gamers while at the same time creating a target for those who didn't understand. Lord knows what will happen, then, when the moral guardians see *Manhunt*.**

In this third-person murder-fest you play the implausibly named James Earl Cash, sentenced to death and executed for the good of the public. Except that didn't happen. The execution was a set-up, to remove Cash from public awareness and use him against his will in cat-and-mouse bloodsports, in ruined Carcer city. Cameras track the action, and you're egged on by the gravelly tones of the faceless Director, who's intent on making abhorrent snuff films from the proceedings.

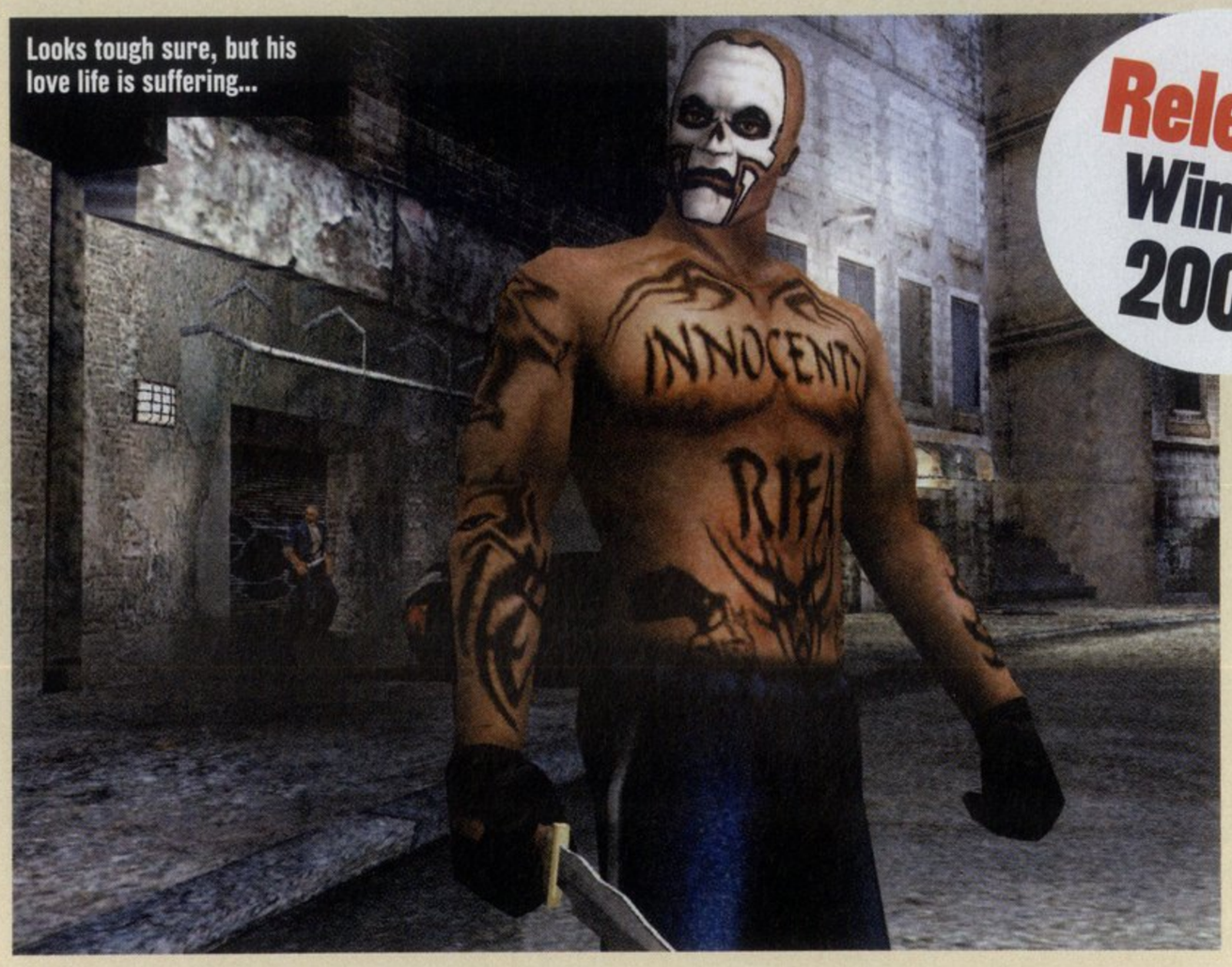
Manhunt is firmly rooted in the stealth genre, but this isn't a game about knocking people unconscious and hiding them in the janitor's cupboard. The main aim is to silently stiff a number of free-roaming thugs who are hunting you through each level. The severity of each kill is rated by how long you take to prepare, so a quick sneak-up will yield less disturbing results than a six-second wait. And fewer points. The better and more graphic the kill, the better your score.

The problem is finding a balance between how long you wait and when you need to strike, as your target is likely to turn around at any moment. Simply fighting your way out is an even more dangerous prospect; make no mistake, worse odds than one-on-one and you're in serious trouble, and Rockstar want it that way. The best strategy generally is to find the shadows and hole up until the chase is called off.


Those thugs are good trackers.

Never has a game asked you to confront the visceral consequences of your actions the way *Manhunt* does. The brutal cut-scenes are the most vicious and animal we've ever seen. Each weapon you're given, from a shard of glass to a hammer, is a step up the ladder: a reward for your ugly kills and the chance to do more. But the kills make the game a difficult experience to persevere with: once you've choked a thug to death with a plastic bag then laid a boot into his dead face, all in grimy, flickery CCTV, there's no going back. And it only gets worse. The images become indelibly etched into your nightmares. The Director revels in each kill, you – at least, we hope – do not. There's no element of compromise in this conversion, either. *Manhunt* will remain as resolutely nasty on PC as it did on Sony's noir shelving unit.

"NEVER HAS A GAME ASKED YOU TO CONFRONT THE VISCERAL CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS THE WAY *MANHUNT* DOES."



Looks tough sure, but his love life is suffering...

Release Winter 2004

As the stakes are raised, the chances of you getting caught increase. The earlier levels are cloaked in darkness, giving you ample time to hide and rethink. But as you continue, it becomes increasingly difficult to escape into the shadows, so that every kill has to be planned to perfection. You must be sure that every step you take is the correct one, or the consequences will be disastrous.

This game was a big hit on the PS2 when released last year, so there's no denying *Manhunt* has the power to be a major release on the PC. The atmosphere is more oppressive than Saddam and darker than burnt treacle. Expect James Earl Cash to receive his final judgement in the pages of PC GAMES ADDICT soon.

COMING SOON!

Shhh! We're lying in wait with a plastic bag, but it'll be a month or two before the postie comes along with the game...

DEVELOPER PROFILE

ROCKSTAR NORTH

Country UK **Established** 2002

www.rockstarnorth.com

These guys have been coding for a while as DMA Design, but the recent name change slots them right into Rockstar's echelon of in-house developers. This talented and controversial team of designers have churned out some of the most controversial and downright fun games of the last decade, as plainly revealed below.

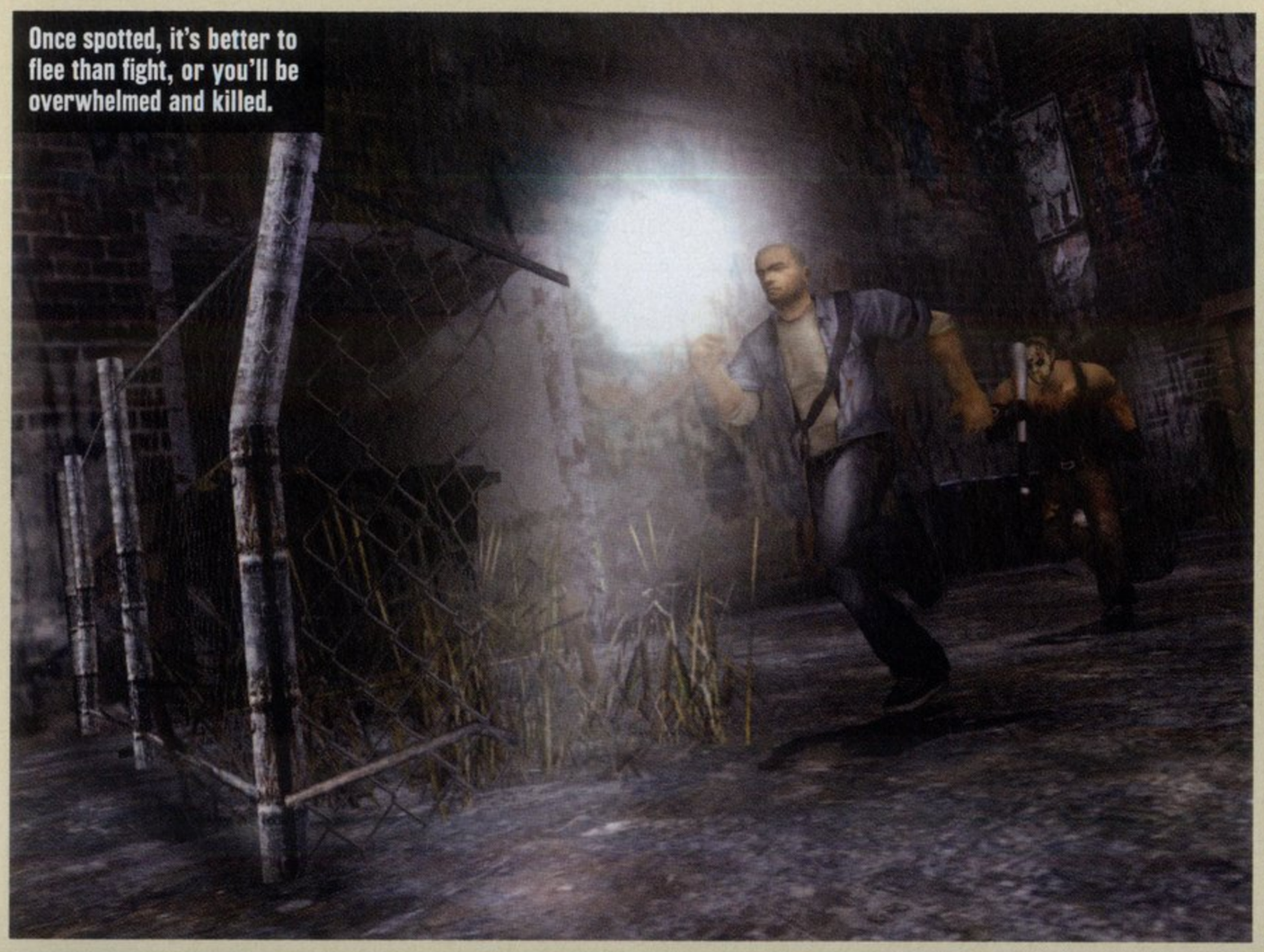
Previous Games

GTA, GTA 2, GTA III, GTA: Vice City, Lemmings, Oni.

- **Genre** Stealth/Third-Person
- **Developer** Rockstar North
- **Publisher** Rockstar Games

YOU'LL KILL FOR *MANHUNT* BECAUSE...

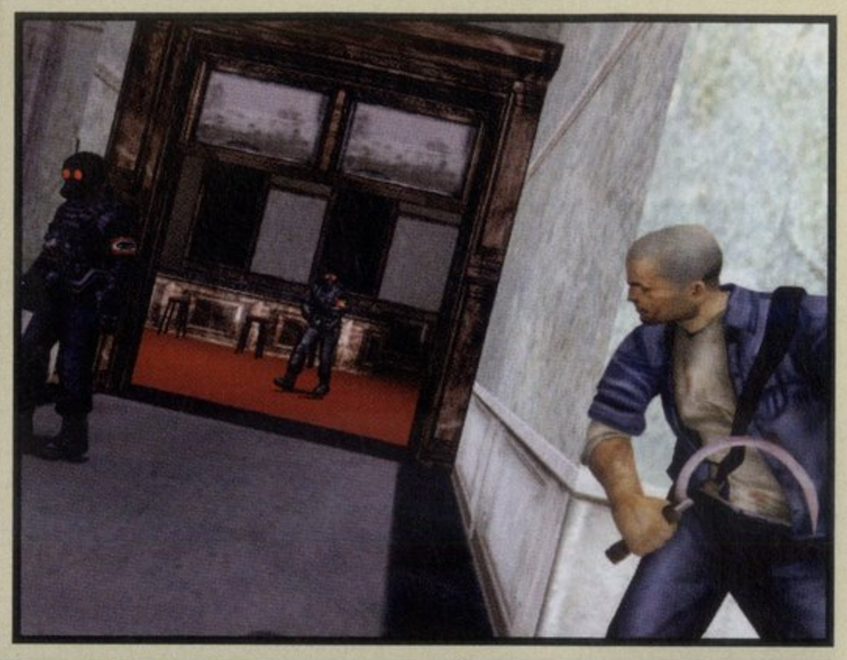
- You're sick like that.
- It takes risks.
- There's never been anything like it.
- It's controversial *and* good.

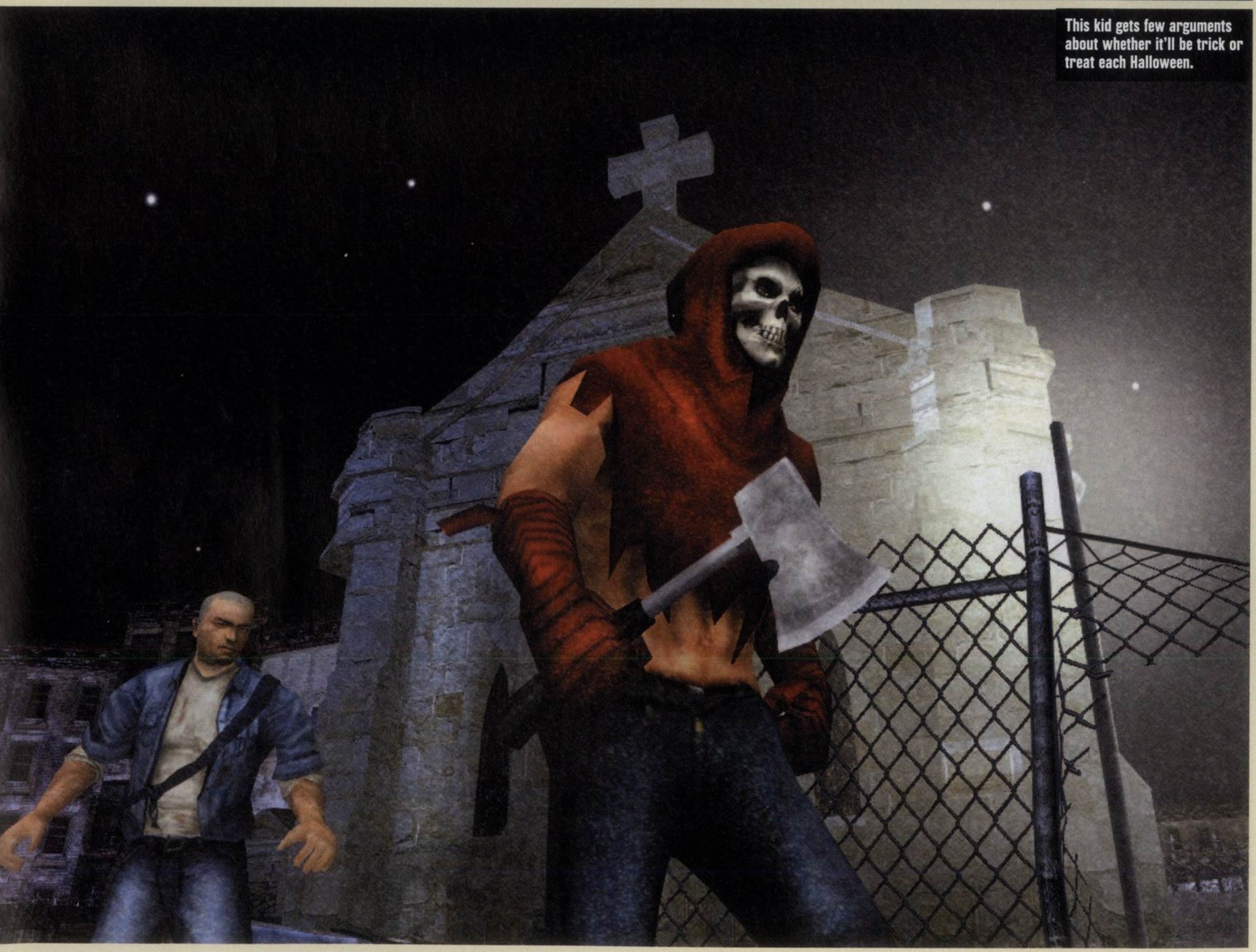


Once spotted, it's better to flee than fight, or you'll be overwhelmed and killed.

UPCLOSE EARGEAR

On the PS2 *Manhunt* used the microphone headset to great effect, and it's no different here. The Director barks instructions in your ear, and you can use the mike to throw out a couple of choice words of your own. The noise is then used to distract or attract the thug you're tracking, setting them up nicely for a shard of glass to the neck. It's a far more involving method of distraction than the old throwing-the-object routine, and adds another level of sheen to the realism.





This kid gets few arguments about whether it'll be trick or treat each Halloween.

SCOOP! YOUR FIRST LOOK AT...

SOLDIERS
HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

We don't know what all the fuss is about. War is clearly bags of fun. **By TIM EDWARDS**

Ah, the inherent humour of the machinegun.

HERE'S a theory: the entertainment a game offers is directly proportional to the inherent comedy potential. Think of *Battlefield: 1942*. Looks like just another WWII shooter, yet as soon as you start messing about, flinging jeeps over cliffs and trying to land Spitfires on barns, you discover you can, quite literally, make your own entertainment. *Soldiers*, a new action RTS in the *Commandos* mould, promises to mine the same under-excavated vein.

Soldiers is a crowd pleaser, a WWII box of toys. It's a literal videogame translation of *playing with soldiers*. Although you won't be dipping your keyboard in egg yolk.

We're watching Callum Godfrey, Codemaster's producer on *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II* take a pair of grunts walkabout. He spots an abandoned motorbike and sidecar, and without a moment's hesitation, they've mounted the bike. "I always think that at this moment we should be playing the Benny Hill theme," Callum says. The surprise is the way the game interface has suddenly changed. Rather than pointing and clicking, Callum has taken direct control of the vehicle, turning the handlebars with the cursor keys. The squad strategy game has been flipped on its head. We're now playing World War II *Micro Machines*. The handling of the vehicles is pure arcade, but reacting to every bump in the ground. When Callum finally clips an outcropping, his motorbike is flipped into the air, landing with an explosion. Later in the demonstration, he hijacks a Messerschmitt and starts shooting up the scenery.

While *Soldiers*' obvious inspiration, *Commandos*, was effectively a puzzle game based around cones of vision, where you had to slip past the artificially over-defined viewpoints of the enemy, *Soldiers* is very much the action evolution. Stealth missions do come into it, but there's no obtrusive iconography littering the screen. Instead, you're able to pore over the gorgeous pastel landscapes, taking in every detail: the floating lily-pads, and the faint tree shadows that sway about in the wind.

Such graphical frippery is matched by a determination to allow you to play with every object within the game. If you've got the firepower, then you should be able to blow your way through any wall to get at the enemy cowering behind. While the mission structure still has to be finalised, Codemasters are promising a gaming soup of strategy and action. You won't be forced down any particular route or style, just left to your own devices. Incendiary devices, obviously.

"THE SQUAD STRATEGY GAME HAS BEEN FLIPPED ON ITS HEAD. WE'RE NOW PLAYING WORLD WAR II *MICRO MACHINES*."

Back to that theory. We've been promised that *Soldiers* will include multi-player. Obviously, there will be deathmatch modes, where you attempt to out-squad your opponent's squaddies. But, in a brilliant twist, Best Way have also been beavering away on co-operative missions where you'll be able to fight for, or against, the Nazi war machine. Take the comedy potential of an intensely destructible world, then add planes, tanks, a devious mind and a horde of Nazi henchmen. Now you know why we're all too eager to command those *Heroes of World War II*.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

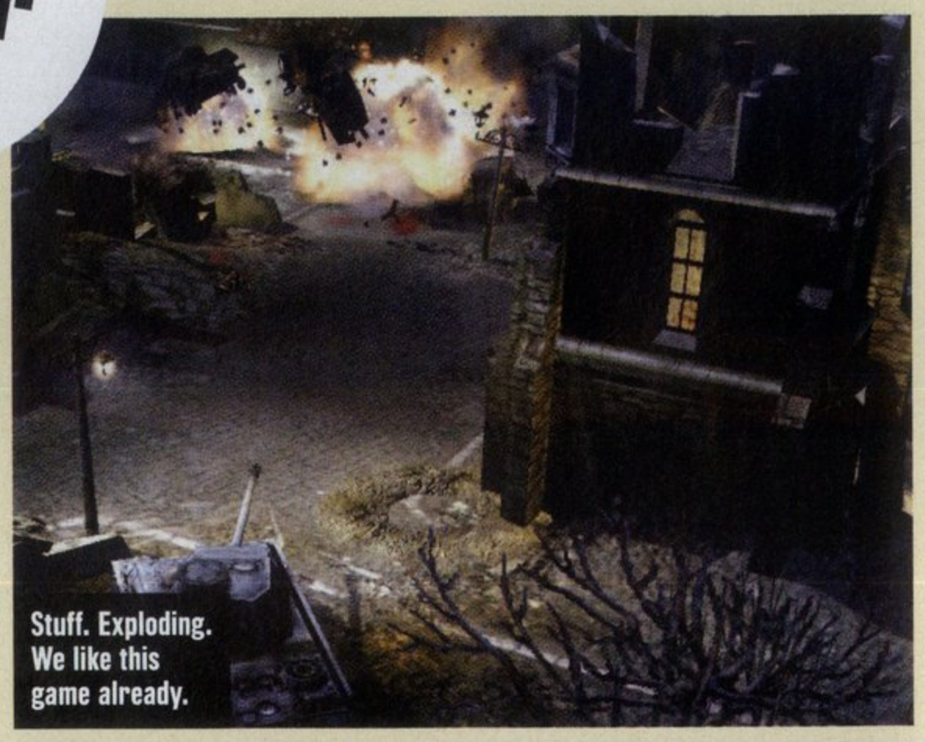
BEST WAY
Country Ukraine
Established 1991
http://int.games.1c.ru

Best Way, the folks behind *Soldiers: Heroes of WWII* are a bit of an unknown quantity. They've been absorbed into the collective known as 1-C, responsible for publishing and promoting a whole bloc of odd, Eastern European-centric titles, including *IL-2 Sturmovik* – the combat flight sim to rule them all. Now they've teamed up with old school Codemasters – the guys responsible for bringing *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis* in from the cold – to bring *Soldiers* to our screens. Got that?

Previous Games: None

Release Winter 2004

You can train your troops. Allegedly.


Stuff. Exploding. We like this game already.

COMING SOON!

We'll be ambushing the nice men at Codemasters for more information in the next couple of months. They should be scared.

- **Genre** Action/Strategy
- **Developer** Best Way
- **Publisher** Codemasters

YOU'LL SIGN UP FOR *SOLDIERS* BECAUSE...

- It lets you play from the Germans' point of view, as well as the Allies'.
- You can hide in giant haystacks.
- Explosions are fun.
- Motorbike and sidecar stunt races are a distinct possibility.

Tanks. Like armoured elephants. Elephants without tusks. Or legs.

UPCLOSE MICROLIGHT UP YOUR LIFE

Along with the usual selection of tanks, panzers and motorbikes, your heroes will be able to hop on board a selection of fighters and bombers, sating any propeller rage. The planes aren't able to get very high off the ground, but they're a joyous and nimble addition. If you time it just right, you can use any handy bump in the terrain as a ramp, landing on a cowering Nazi. Hurrah for the machinery of war.

The battle lines are drawn. In pastel.

EYEWIT

THE PC GAMING UNIVERSE IN 11 PACKED PAGES!

SPECIAL NEWS REPORT

PREMIUM BOND

GoldenEye on the PC? Shurely shome mishtake?

In the midst of a major revamp of their back catalogue, Electronic Arts are rumoured to be bringing back *Desert Strike*, *Syndicate* and, most importantly, console favourite *GoldenEye*.

A spokeswoman from EA furnished us with a firm "no comment" regarding the first two games, but *GoldenEye 2* (working title) was officially announced just before we went to press. Electronic Arts' Los Angeles studio, whose previous work includes the disappointing *Spearhead* add-on for *Medal of Honour*, have been tasked with hopefully surpassing the success of current console Bond hit, *Everything Or Nothing*. Intriguingly, you'll play as a renegade agent who's kicked out of MI6 and ends up working for chubby megalomaniac Auric Goldfinger. Specific platforms have yet to be announced, but we're hopeful they'll offer up a PC version this time – the taste of *Nightfire* is still sour in our mouths. Warrington-based EA Northwest, meanwhile, are said to be the team who'll be bringing the classic *Desert Strike* series back to our monitors.

GoldenEye 2 is a particularly intriguing prospect. The N64 original is still revered as perhaps the best console-based FPS of all time, and the greatest movie conversion as well. If it does make it to the PC, the game would have to technically be another conversion of the movie, as the rights to the console game lie elsewhere.

The *Desert Strike* series was last updated with *Nuclear Strike*, but there's a whole new Middle-East conflict to mine for scenarios now. It's also in need of a serious engine update, being primarily a console game and isometric. During the '90s, *Strike* was one of EA's most successful series, so it's no great surprise that they could be looking to update it. We'd love to see it with a fully scaleable 3D environment, like *Commandos* but with choppers. And tanks.

Syndicate's name in the rumour mill is definitely an exciting proposal. It's been up to *Deus Ex* to sate our dark, corporation-mangling desires since *Syndicate Wars* evilly chuckled in our ears. It could end up being a multi-player classic if coded thoughtfully.

"You'll play as a renegade agent who's kicked out of MI6."

Speaking of *Deus Ex* and conspiracies, all this rumour-mongering gave us a taste for rummaging through the bins of a few of the industry's other major players as this issue hurtled towards deadline like an angry bull elephant. And boy, did we find some gems...

First up, it's whispered that *Deus*

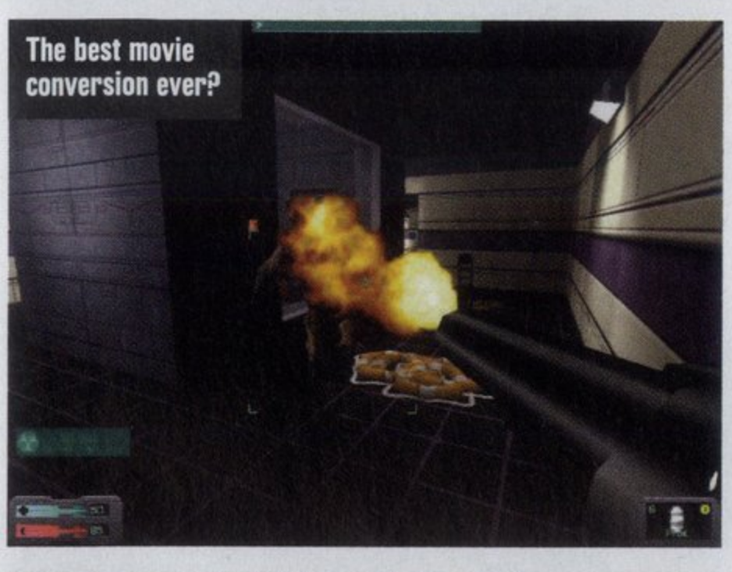
We want *System Shock 3*, dammit!

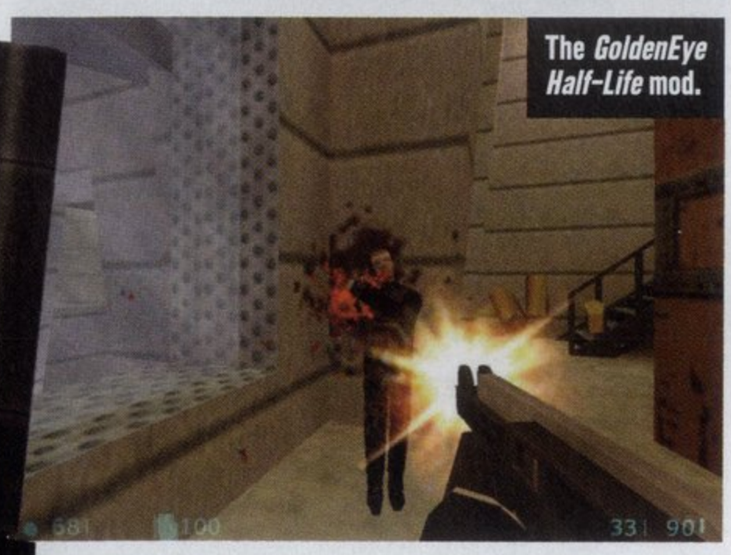
EA are digging out their classics.

FITNESS

Viewing games through the hessian gauze of nostalgia is a typically misguiding experience, but the remakes that EA are rumoured to be working on are all dyed-in-the-wool classics. There's definitely something going on at EA HQ and if the speculation is true, then the next year could well be a classic for gamers.

CRAIG PEARSON, STAFF WRITER


The best movie conversion ever?


The *GoldenEye* *Half-Life* mod.

Warren Spector will be the creative mastermind behind Lara Croft's reinvention in the next *Tomb Raider* game. Mind you, the recent announcement that the project has been handed to Crystal Dynamics rather scotches that one.

Finally, we've had confirmation that the next instalment in the now-legendary *Grand Theft Auto* series will be subtitled *San Andreas*, as we rather suspected. The good news is that the PS2 version will be out in October this year. The bad news? No confirmation of a PC version yet. But we'd bet Mark's favourite scrunchy on it.

Further Information

www.ea.com
■ Shop here for all your 'no comment' needs.

SHAKER REMAKER

Properly in the mood for digging up the past, we visited www.remakes.org to see just what sort of old classics have already been updated with spangly modern graphics. The results surprised us.

HIGHWAY PURSUIT

A *SpyHunter* remake. It's better than the terrible update that the game received on the consoles. A simple left-right car-skidder makes for a playable and difficult game. You can download it from here: www.adamdawes.com

UFO: ALIEN INVASION

***X-COM* remade using the *Quake* engine. It's not an FPS, though. It's a turn-based strategy game, and amazingly accomplished for a remake. And the odd use of the *Quake* engine gives the remake a distinct look. We have it on our discs this month, so have a look. Everyone else, go here: http://ufo.myexp.de**

SENTRY

***Sentinel* remade. The classic tree-munching strategy game was always an odd fish, and it's good to know you can still experience it and its thousands of absorbing levels. Grab it from here: http://eicart.free.fr/sentry**

The classic *Syndicate* is just screaming out for an *Unreal*-based update.

MORE GAMING NEWS OVER THE PAGE...

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It's OK: we don't understand it half the time, either.

18 **DOOM 3**
They said there'd be no more info until the release, but those id boys just can't help themselves. They're so excitable.

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Tim gives you a piece of his mind; um, can we have it back, now? Pretty please?

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For the love of God, won't someone please think of the children!

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Does Bill Gates deserve to get a KBE from the Queen? Or just our undying love?

GOBBETS

BORN TO FRAG

You'd think US Army funding would be going towards finding the next country to target, but no. They're getting in on the videogame act in a big way. The army's next project is an MMO virtual world, where you command virtual troops and govern everything from their training to combat. This game follows other projects like *America's Army* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*. Right (wing) on!

COR-VET!

Pterodon have announced plans to follow up *Vietcong*. All we have at the minute is the promise that it'll definitely be a game in the *Vietcong* universe. As for what form it will take, we're assuming that it'll put us back into a first-person jungle swear-fest. For more info, and the chance to provide some feedback, visit www.pterodon.com

RING BLINDER

In the *Halo* universe, something is stirring. We just don't know what. Gearbox have done a lot of work creating PC-only updates for the uber-shooter, but they're in limbo over this one until Microsoft and Bungie have had a look at the thing. We're not sure if it's an expansion pack even a free download, but *Halo* fans have *something* to look forward to. We do know an update is on its way bringing shader enhancements (translation: better graphics). Keep looking at the forums on www.gearbox.com for any updates.

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

SOLAR: CAMPAIGNS

They just need to finish *Breed*, first.

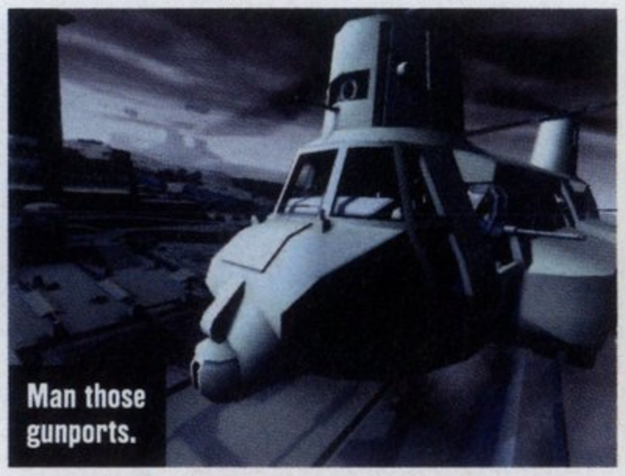
Brat Designs, they of the much-delayed *Breed*, have announced their next opus. *Solar: Campaigns* is set in the middle of a vast power struggle between the Eastern Collective Democracy and the United Western Alliance as they both fight for the meagre resources of our barren solar system.

Earth is a broken shell, where both the factions have interests. The Moon is a wasteland, a dumping ground for the filth and detritus of humanity. Mars, partially terraformed as a mining world, is another wreck, scarred and pitted from the brutal conflict. Each world has a set campaign to complete and each faction has its own technology to inflict upon the enemy.

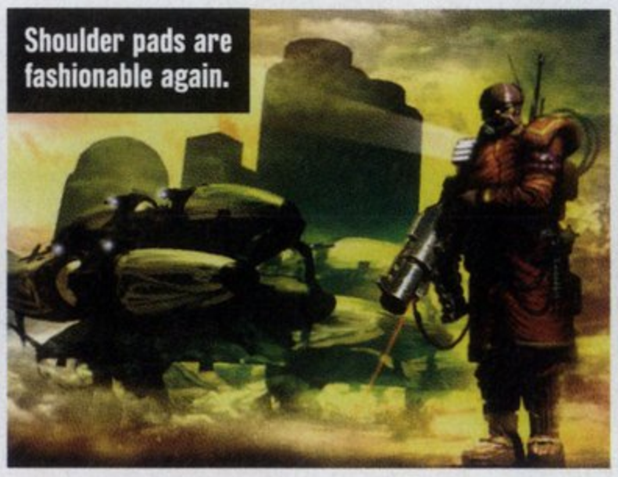
What's promised is a 'tightly focused, near future battlefield', with both single and multi-player modes. Similar to *Breed* in scope, the terrains have huge draw distances and dynamic weather effects, but there's a strong tactical dimension promised too.

Buildings crumble under enough bombardment and scenery can be cleared through vehicular assault or a well-placed grenade. The battlefield changes as you make your impact on it. Throw in a bunch of undead warriors, the Necro, animated from the toxic waste of the war, and you've got an interesting prospect.

■ **Release date** TBA
■ **Website** www.brat-designs.com/brat.html



Man those gunports.



Shoulder pads are fashionable again.

Earth's taken quite a bashing.

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67

Francis Ford Coppola would be proud.

Eidos have announced they're bringing their controversial Vietnam game to the PC. *ShellShock: Nam '67* focuses on the atrocities of the Vietnam War, seen through the eyes of a rookie soldier as he first experiences the brutality of conflict. He works his way up the ranks all the way to Special Forces in a variety of viciously realistic missions, from assassinating a VC commander to calling in napalm bombardments on civilians. Even then, the only goal is to survive a year in hell, with no other objective planned.

Developers Guerrilla are interested in confronting you with the finer details of war, violence and death. The game depicts mutilated bodies in detail: severed heads are frozen in fear, halved bodies have fragments of spinal column poking out. This far in development, the depiction of conflict is genuinely disturbing. The illustration of the crucified soldier is just one of a number of disturbing elements you'll be forced to deal with.

And the realism stretches to the team and single tactics that were used in the conflict. The jungle environment is an enemy in itself, giving the local fighters ample place to hide themselves and their truly nasty booby traps. This looks like it won't be just another FPS.

■ **Release date** Autumn-Winter
■ **Website** www.shellshockgame.com

You're not spared the gory details.

There's a rumble in the jungle – Nam style.

NAVAL SIM

MIDWAY

Battles at sea that go all the way.

Here's a piece of clever thinking: WWII is all the rage, yes, but it's all been on (or at least over) land so far. *Midway* (working title) promises to change that, as you'll directly control planes, ships and even aircraft carriers. We'll have much more on this massively exciting title next issue.

■ **Release date** Spring

No running around on foot for you here – it's all about the vehicles.

STRATEGY

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE THIRD REICH

Feel the Force.

Screenshots of Irrational Games' next *Freedom Force* game have emerged. The WWII-themed comic-book strategy game is now in development, and Irrational will be publishing it themselves. A brave decision, but one that makes sense considering the hit the first game was.

It remains strikingly similar to the first – but in a good way. The camera stays close to the action, moving in to an extreme close-up to show off Irrational's bells and whistles.

The *Freedom Force* team have travelled back in time to take on Blitzkrieg, a powerful Nazi supervillain. The fighters have a range of cool-looking powers, including the Captain America homage shield, which is powerful enough to re-direct evil Nazi bullets. And needless to say, It all takes place in a stylised version of the 1940s.

Suddenly, the road turned Reich.

The previous game was a carefully balanced mini-masterpiece of high camp adventure and Zapp! Pow! action. We're looking forward to more of the same with this intriguing sequel.

■ **Release date** Winter
■ **Website** www.freedomfans.com

SLIPPAGE CENTRAL

THESE ARE THE GAMES YOU *WON'T* BE PLAYING ANY TIME SOON.

HALF-LIFE 2

Valve/Vivendi

It's so close we can taste it. And it tastes like strawberries and cream. Valve have announced a winter release for *Half-Life 2*, so you can all kiss goodbye to suntans. That April release date was aways too good to be true, but this one looks solid.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

Activision

The *Half-Life 2* setback has affected every game licensed with the *HL2* Source engine, and as a result we're expecting *Vampire* to suffer. Sorry, would-be bloodsuckers, but your game is likely to be put off until 2005.

SOLDNER

Bigben Interactive

This soldier sim is currently going through strenuous beta testing, and the resultant tweaking and testing means the release date has been put back. Originally scheduled for a autumn release, Bigben are now saying winter, so anyone with a MMO fight fetish will have to hold on to their kitbags for now.

GOBBETS

HELLO KITTY

EA have announced they're bringing the Halle Berry version of Catwoman to a monitor near you. The acrobatic ex-squeeze of the man-bat is in one of the summer's big event movies; in-game she'll have a special sixth sense, the ability to leap and pounce like a cat, and a whip, presumably making up for the lack of a tail. Seven different locations from the movie are also on offer. In the meantime, snigger at this picture of Halle.

CARTOON TIME

The fluffy *Mysterious Island* is a mixture of adventure and RTS. Find the rest of your friends scattered around the island, then organise them to build a raft on which to escape. A bit like Lord of the Flies, then, but presumably with fewer fat kids getting crushed by rocks. The game features three missions and lots of enemies to scuffle with. The developers currently seek a publisher. More at www.simplygamingpr.co.uk

SOURCE WITH THAT?

Valve Software have confirmed that Arkane Studios have licensed the Source Engine for their follow-up to *Arx Fatalis*. It's not known yet just what form the game will take, but with Source's impressively emotive character animation and AI routines, it's surely capable of creating a fine RPG. This follows on from news that Source has been shored up and is more secure now.

REAL-TIME STRATEGY

EVIL GENIUS

"Infamy! Infamy! They've all got it infamy!" Sorry, Kenneth.

The henchmen are pretty scary.

Skills are taught and learned easily enough.

New information on *Evil Genius*, following a recent journalistic infiltration of the developers' secret HQ. There wasn't time for us to go large on Elixir's Bond-style supervillain sim, but draw closer, we have a couple of secrets to pass on.

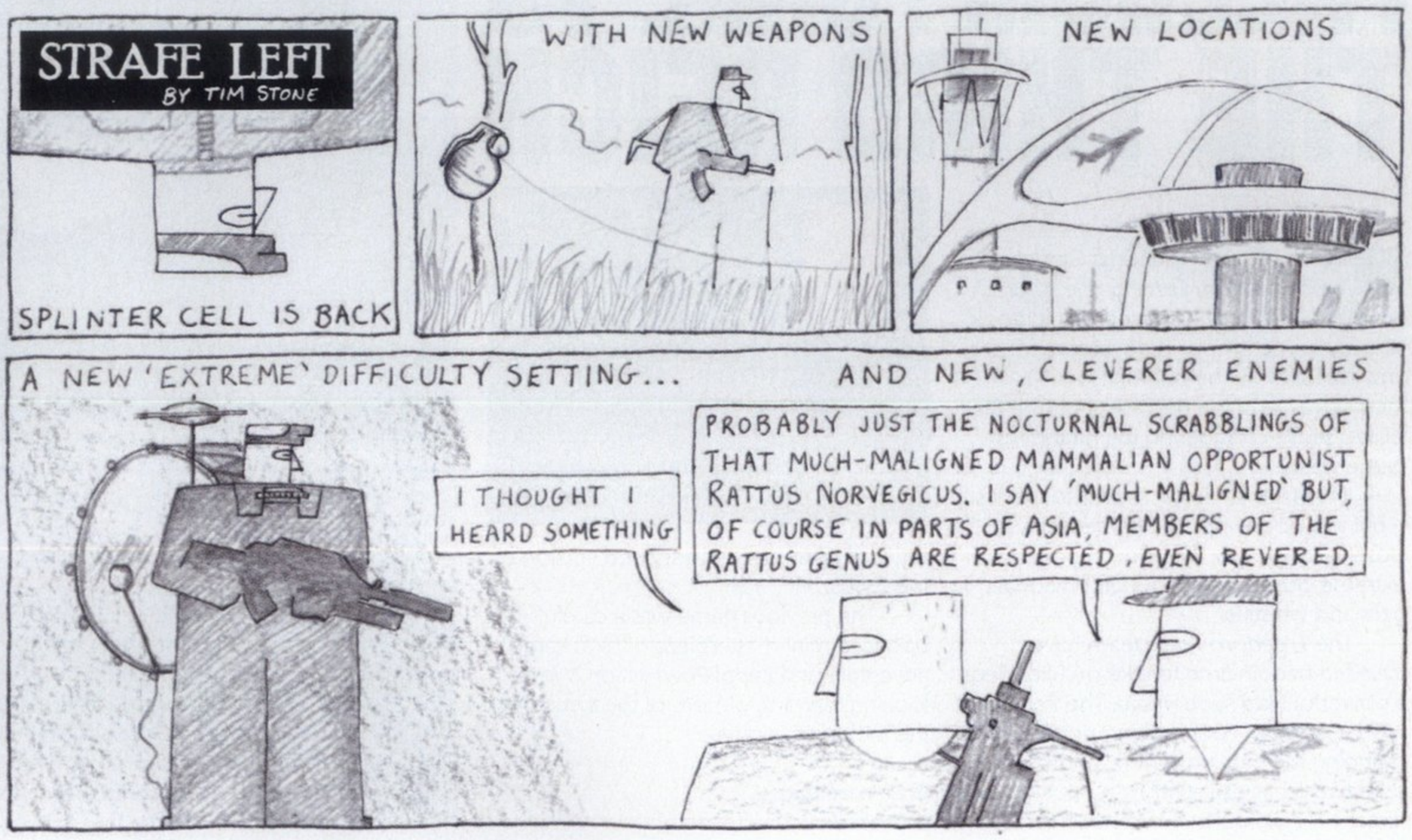
Notoriety plays a huge part in the game. Makes sense. The one thing an *Evil Genius* needs is for the people to fear him, and this is done with huge daring acts of infamy. For example, it's possible to steal the Eiffel Tower and display it for your minions to see. This raises your status in the world, but also gives your henchmen and workers something to aspire to. There are up to one hundred acts of infamy to perpetrate in *Evil Genius*, from nicking landmarks, or famous paintings, to making Dr Evil style broadcasts over all the television channels. In *Evil Genius*, motivation comes from awe.

Oh, and torture. You can't be a supervillain without a spot of this. The fun thing is, you can use almost any device to torture the people in your cells. Food mixers, usually used to whip up a cake, are just the right size to stick an agent in and get Delia on his ass.

Experimenting with your many toys is key to *EG*'s fun.

Sadly, with a good six months' of polish to be added, it'll be a while before you get your hands on this. Meanime, we'll keep you posted.

■ **Release date** Spring
■ **Website** www.elixir-studios.co.uk


STRAFE LEFT
BY TIM STONE
SPLINTER CELL IS BACK
WITH NEW WEAPONS
NEW LOCATIONS
A NEW 'EXTREME' DIFFICULTY SETTING...
I THOUGHT I HEARD SOMETHING
AND NEW, CLEVERER ENEMIES
PROBABLY JUST THE NOCTURNAL SCRABBLINGS OF THAT MUCH-MALIGNED MAMMALIAN OPPORTUNIST RATTUS NORVEGICUS. I SAY 'MUCH-MALIGNED' BUT, OF COURSE IN PARTS OF ASIA, MEMBERS OF THE RATTUS GENUS ARE RESPECTED, EVEN REVERED.

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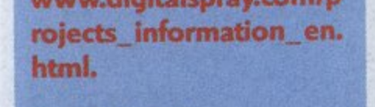
MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

GOBBETS

HOLLOW CAN YOU GO?

Zootfly are putting together *Hollow*, a twisted shooter set in, wait for it, 'a disco-Totalitarian state'. It's an alternative '70s, where WWII never happened and ex-journalist Tyler Kilmore must kill numerous people in order to save mankind. This freeform FPS mixes up a mess of genres, moving from stealth to all-out action. Any game that has "wicked groovy cops" deserves your attention. More at games.zootfly.com/hollow

RUSSIAN DOLLS



Russia remains a hive of gaming activity. Here are two of the more promising-looking titles. *You Are Empty* is set in yet another totalitarian state. An entire city is running an experiment to create superhuman communists. As always, the experiment goes horribly wrong. The other game is *Triangle*. Set in the Bermuda Triangle, it's a classic kill-everything-with-a-heartbeat game, involving aliens and mysterious temples. www.digitalspray.com/projects_information_en.html.

T AND A!

Gas Powered Games are working on a follow-up to the rather spiffy RTS *Total Annihilation*. Speaking at a recent careers day, President Chris Taylor let slip this gobbet before clamming up entirely. So far all we know is the publisher won't be Microsoft. The rest is very much up for speculation. So let it begin please.

MARS ATTACKS

DOOM 3

Welcome to Hell. Population: lots.

The Trites: creepy crawly monster heads.

Boogie down at the Hell Knight Klub.

The day of reckoning is approaching. The hour of judgment. As you read this, development on *Doom 3* is accelerating. The demons of Hell are closing in inexorably on the UAC outpost on Mars, just as they did ten years ago. And, as usual, PC GAMES ADDICT is here with the new screenshots.

According to Tim Willits, *Doom 3*'s lead designer, the game is a reworking of the original *Doom*, closer, in retrospect, to what the tiny id Software team originally set out to create. "Although the original *Doom* technology was groundbreaking for its day," Tim says, "it is with *Doom 3* that the original vision is being fully realised, and we can present an experience that rivals CG movies. When John Carmack started researching the new technology after *Quake III* he saw the potential in the unbelievable environments that could be created with the lighting, shadows and bump mapping, and knew that now was the time to bring his original vision for the *Doom* world to life."

"We want you to believe you're there, on Mars."

How will id expand on their vision? By taking you out of your comfy seat and enveloping you in a real world, that's how. As Tim explains: "When you sit down to play *Doom 3*, we want you to believe that you're there, on Mars, battling the most unbelievably scary creatures you've ever seen. It is those moments, when you've completely forgotten that you're playing a game, that we can terrify you the most, and we must utilise every element of the technology, art and design to suspend your disbelief."

In a move that sounds heavily inspired by *Half-Life*, you'll be allowed to become familiar with your environment before Hell breaks loose. "Upon arriving at the UAC," says Tim, "you will have an option to explore a limited amount of the facility before the demonic invasion takes place. You can explore some of the more administrative areas, talk with other characters and learn about what is going on with the experiments, while discovering some secrets about the other main characters." Then, id turn off the lights.

To combat the hellish threat, id are providing a few toys. These include the usual array of ballistic tools, and the odd mystical artefact. "The original *Doom* weapons that are returning are the pistol, shotgun, chaingun, plasma rifle, rocket launcher and BFG. We have also added a new light machinegun, HE grenades, as well as a special weapon called the Soul Cube. It's an ancient weapon, one created millions of years ago to stop the forces of Hell. It was used in an epic battle of good versus evil long before Earth was anything like we know it today."

Ah, one of those. We'll bring you more *Doom*-laden news as we get it.

This man wants to eat your brain.

■ **Release date** When It's Done
■ **Website** www.doom3.com

ILLUSTRATION: STEVE LILLIE

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

RANTINGS FROM THE SOAPBOX OF GAMING

PC GAMERS ARE HAVING TO PUT UP WITH INCREASINGLY OUTDATED AND IRRELEVANT COPY PROTECTION. STRAP ON YOUR PIRATE EYE-PATCH AND SEND YE MAIL TO **PCGA@DERWENTHOWARD.COM.AU**

PC gamers suffer from piracy. It's a curse that afflicts us all. Thanks to piracy we have to put up with increasingly ludicrous copy protection systems, created by publishers desperate to protect their multi-million pound investments. But the techniques they've developed are more trouble than they're worth.

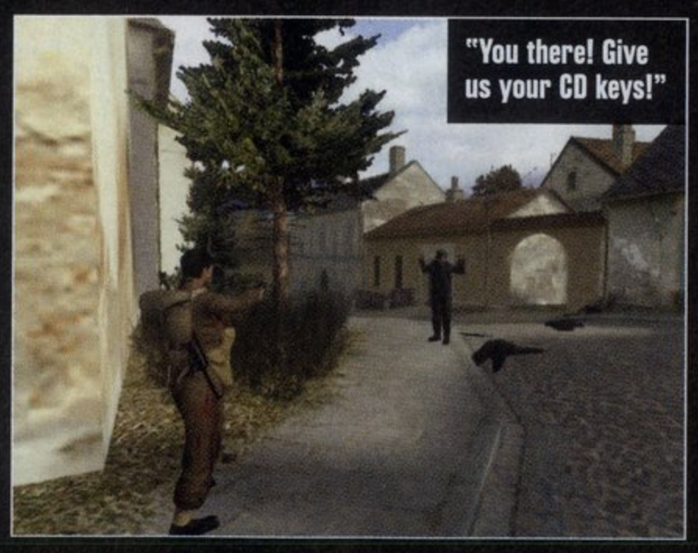
Here's my story. It doesn't make for pretty reading. I'd been following *Hidden & Dangerous 2* like a distressed puppy. Every time Take Two put the date back, adding more features, bringing the game up to a higher spec, I'd bounce right back, pawing at the door, desperate to play. The news was good. My tail was wagging. This was going to be brilliant. Tongue out. Panting. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha... At last, my copy arrived.

The CD key, required to *install* the game, wasn't printed on my manual. Despite shelling out close to 100 bucks for it, I still wasn't allowed to play. Surely, that meant my game was faulty? A call to technical support soon put me in my place. "We can't just hand out CD keys over the phone," rebuked the snivelling whelp at the other end of the phone. "How would we protect our game?"

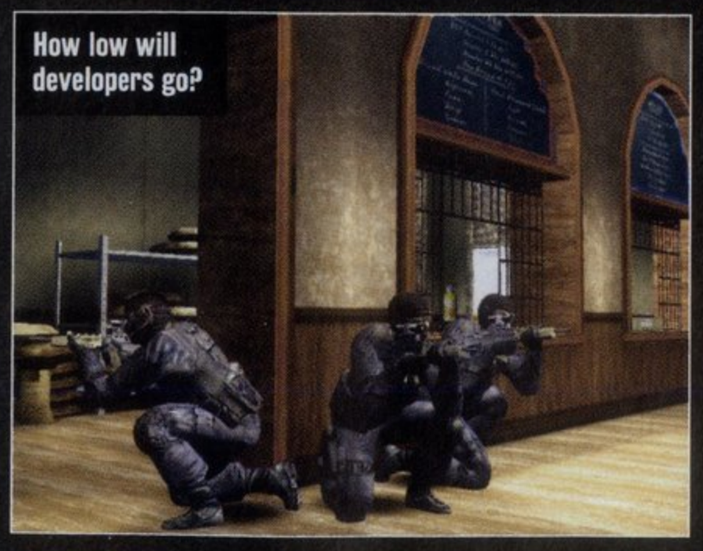
Enter the internet, stage left. Using a bare minimum of research, I managed to find a CD Key generator. Ten minutes later, I was home free, infiltrating bases, saving the world. To get there, I had to circumvent the copy protection system on this game, an act that in the near future will become illegal.

Another example. The latest patch for *Raven Shield* hates you. If you try to install the game on a PC that uses a virtual drive, as does every PC in every LAN café on the planet, the game refuses to run. It sits in the corner of your hard drive, sulking.

But while the publishers have been cracking down, piracy has become a whole lot easier. Throughout the world, wherever games are too expensive to even consider purchasing at full price, bright young programmers are paid to crack them. Once cracked, the games are re-written to CD-Rs, re-packaged and distributed. These are full copies, lacking nothing but copy protection, yet they're easier to use than the retail versions. A fact that if carried to its logical conclusion means they're actually *better*. It only takes one of those copies to be shared online for every anti-piracy measure to be worthless, broken down, beaten. It took less than 24 hours before a *Raven Shield* anti-patch patch was released, knocking out that game's little 'innovation' at a stroke.



"You there! Give us your CD keys!"



How low will developers go?

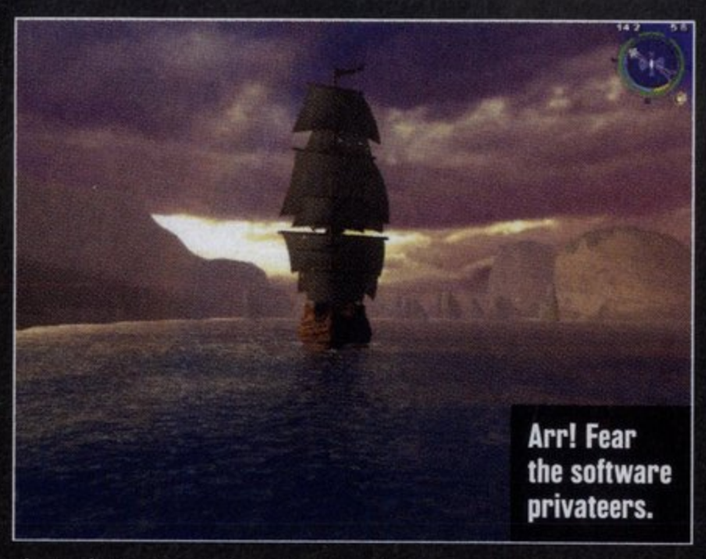
And this situation is only going to get worse. The speed of the worldwide computer network is rising. We're becoming more connected – gamers represent the first, and most computer literate, ultra-connected society on the planet. To be a PC gamer is to become a member of a global, distributed community with a shared interest. Together, we're intimately familiar with the tools of digital piracy: a CD-RW drive and BitTorrent. Developers understand too: they're distributing their latest patches through the same route – legitimate content sharing the same bandwidth as evil, nasty, cracked software. But that's not the silly part.

This is the silly part. The arms war between the developer and the pirate is looking increasingly like a scene from any RTS. Technologies are developed, and for the moment, legitimacy confers an advantage. Then, a counter-unit is trained: bigger guns, better weapons. Back to the stalemate.

"It took less than 24 hours before a *Raven Shield* anti-patch patch was released."

It's a war that can never be won. There are too many pirates, and too much money to be made in distributing their easily ripped-off wares, for them to ever go away. But the conflict can be contained – by ensuring that any copy protection measures put in place appear seamless to the average gamer. CD keys are ill-advised relics; yesterday's technology cack-handedly bolted onto the fabric of today's games. They're becoming irrelevant. An invisible, reliable replacement needs to be found before all gamers discover how easy they are to bypass.

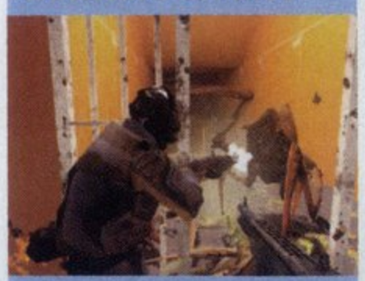
Tim Edwards doesn't agree with piracy. It's obnoxious and immoral. Besides, his eye-patch needs a wash, and the parrot he defrosted last week has wilted. Between playing PC games, he loves to write about them. Just as well.



Arr! Fear the software privateers.

GOBBETS

STEAMY STORY



The irony is heavy in this one. Valve have turned to the creator of the peer-to-peer file-sharing application BitTorrent to help them with Steam. Bram Cohen was approached by Gabe Newell to help out with the company's software. Oddly enough, it was through the reams of P2P networks that Valve's leaked source code and the *Half-Life 2* beta were made freely available to download. Cohen's BitTorrent application has been embraced by PC users and file distribution sites, where large downloads are shared through the downloaders. More on Steam at www.steampowered.com

JOURNEY ON

Finally, after a long PCGA campaign, the Norwegian government have agreed to financially help with the development of *Dreamfall*, the second in the *Longest Journey* series. We think it was the threat from John Walker that tipped the scales, as he valiantly agreed to a hop on a plane and do some 'Nekkid Maypoling' outside the Norwegian parliament until they gave into our demands.

WOULD YOU...

Adam and Eve it? *EVE Online* is claiming a world record for the number of people on a server at once. On 15th February at 10.45pm, 7,250 people were all online at the same time. And in other *EVE* news, registered *EVE* users can now invite buddies to sign up for three days for free. www.eve-online.com

THE SPY

THE SPY DISCOVERS THAT IN AMERICA, AGE RATINGS AREN'T ALWAYS TO BE TRUSTED.

ILLUSTRATION DAVID LYTTLETON

As the major breadwinner in Maison Spy, Daddy Spy likes to know that Baby Spy isn't going to see something that young eyes shouldn't. Age ratings are stuck to with a religious intensity, and any hint of nastiness is kept for Daddy Spy's Alienware. But The Spy will have to be extra vigilant when he goes down the import route, as it seems ratings from across the pond can't always be guaranteed.

It appears that some companies in America aren't being entirely honest with their age ratings. The Spy's sources have unearthed a recent study in which it was found that almost half of all games have some content that is not flagged up on the content box. The ESRB ratings box has long been held as a guide for the American consumer, but now it has been revealed that discrepancies in what should be allowed in games could be exposing younger gamers to elements their parents would rather they didn't see.

Although overall the tone and content of most games matched their ratings, the fact that almost half contain some acts that may offend is clearly worrying. These acts ranged from simulated alcohol and tobacco intake, to acts of violence, and in some cases simulated sexual activity.

From The Spy's becloaked perspective, it's this kind of discrepancy that can lead to the knee-jerk reactions certain people have towards games and their content. Often when games are criticised, it's specific moments or incidents that are picked upon. Perhaps it's time for the American industry to adopt an OFLC style rating, with clear age definitions laid out?

Back to the actual game world. Are you sitting down? If not, we'd suggest you park yourself on something soft and take long, deep breaths before reading the next bit. One of the more lascivious rumours to ripen the grapevine is that Microsoft are in talks with Blizzard to secure *World of Warcraft* as an exclusive for the Xbox. The Spy has yet to hear anything concrete to back this up, but we all know how Microsoft used Bill's wallet to prise *Halo* from the PC. Could we be losing one of this year's hottest gaming properties to the billionaire's pet console?

The Spy isn't one to rat on industry professionals, so no names will be mentioned in this final piece of tittle-tattle. It turns out that some game companies have been employing people to 'talk up' their games on internet forums, tapping into word-of-mouth promotion with the sort of directness that PR people simply aren't capable of. It's an industry-wide tactic and can take many forms, so just bear it in mind the next time you're having an online argument about the merits of Generic Shooter #2. The Spy has yet to discover if there are companies out there that pay folk to badmouth other games, but rest assured if he does you'll be the first to know.

Finally, while in Finland for a spot of reindeer hunting, a loose-lipped Ghillie let slip the existence of a third *Max Payne* game under development at Remedy. Remember: you heard it here first. Spy out.

"Microsoft wants *World of Warcraft* exclusively for Xbox."

THE OFFICIAL PC GAMES addict TOP TEN

1	NE	Far Cry	Ubisoft
2	NE	Counter Strike Condition Zero	Vivendi
3	NE	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari
4	NE	Battlefield Vietnam	Electronic Arts
5	(1)	The Sims: Deluxe	Electronic Arts
6	(3)	The Sims: Unleashed	Electronic Arts
7	(2)	The Sims: Superstar	Electronic Arts
8	NE	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
9	(5)	The Sims: Makin' Magic	Electronic Arts
10	NE	CSI 2: Dark Motives	Ubisoft

Charts compiled by Inform (www.informbd.com.au)

inform
Charts can be viewed at **www.informbd.com.au** as part of Inform's comprehensive database of online market intelligence, updated weekly
Inform tracks the weekly sales of business and leisure technology products, and provides detailed reports to subscribers and Reseller & Retail panel members. For subscription or panel membership details phone 02 9264 0095. Copyright © 2002 by Inform. All rights reserved.

PC GAMES addict RECOMMENDED

SUMMER'S HERE, BUT PLAYING THESE GAMES IS MUCH MORE FUN THAN WEARING SPEEDOS.

Battlefield: Vietnam

82%

It's all about the helicopters. Grab a Huey, whistle Ride of the Valkyries to yourself, and start strafing the Vietcong positions in this frantic update to *Battlefield: 1942*. Best of all: you can now airlift tanks into the jungle. Oh and you get Khe Sanh without Barnsey's horrid wailing.

Deus Ex: Invisible War

92%

Finally available for purchase in Europe. *Invisible War* is *Deus Ex* refined. Choose your path in a global conspiracy. Do you sympathise with the terrorists, or join the forces of oppression? Or just push barrels down stairs a lot?

Call of Duty

91%

If *Medal of Honour* demonstrated what WWII games could be capable of, *Call of Duty* is the reaisation of that promise. The extravagant battle scenes are cinema squared. It's the new red-flag bearer of first-person shooters, and essential.

X2: The Threat

87%

A space-sim made for *Elite* fans. Take time out from saving worlds to cruise between them, carving your own niche in a gorgeous universe. When you're bored with planning trade routes, consider a career as a pirate or privateer, or just head off to explore.

DONE WHEN IT'S DONE

Key to charts **New entry this month** ● *Sounds about right to us* ● *Are you really sure about that?* ● *Yeah, right. Dream on, buddy.*

GAME NAME	PUBLISHER	LATEST RELEASE DATE
Age of Empires 3	Microsoft	TBA
Beyond Divinity	CDV	Autumn 2004 ●
Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	Spring 2004 ●
BloodRayne 2	Vivendi	TBA
Bloody Waters: Terror from the Deep	TBA	TBA
Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	TBA	2004 ●
Championship Manager 5	Eidos	Spring 2004 ●
Close Combat: Afrika Korps	GMX	TBA
Codename: Panzers	CDV	Autumn 2004 ●
Conan	TBA (TDK shut offices)	TBA
Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars	CDV	Autumn 2004 ●
Desert Rats vs. Afrika Korps	Digital Jesters	April 2004 ●
Deus Ex 3	Eidos	TBA
Doom III	Activision	2004 ●
Duke Nukem Forever	Rockstar	2004 ●
Dungeon Siege 2	Microsoft	2004 ●
Dungeons & Dragons Online	Atari	2005 ●
Driver 3	Atari	Winter 2004 ●
Everquest II	Ubi Soft	June 2004 ●
Evil Genius	Vivendi	March 2004 ●
Freedom Force vs The Third Reich	TBA	Autumn 2004 ●
Football Manager	Sega	Spring 2004 ●
Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	Winter 2004 ●
Ground Control 2	Vivendi	March 2004 ●
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	May 2004 ●
Hidden & Dangerous 3	Take Two	TBA
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	2004 ●
Jagged Alliance 2: Wildfire	Strategy First	Autumn 2004 ●
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	June 2004 ●
Kill Bill	Vivendi	2005 ●
Kingdom Under Fire: Crusaders	Phantagram	TBA ●
Manhunt	Take Two	Winter 2004 ●
Medal of Honour: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	April 2004 ●
Men of Valour: Vietnam	Vivendi	Spring 2004 ●
Middle-Earth Online	Vivendi	2004 ●
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	2005 ●
Panzers	CDV	Summer 2004 ●
Perimeter	Codemasters	2004 ●
Pirates!	Atari	2004 ●
Quake IV	Activision	Christmas 2004 ●
Race Driver 2: Ultimate Racing Simulator	Codemasters	Winter 2004 ●
Restricted Area	4am	April 2004 ●
Richard Burns Rally	SCi	May 2004 ●
Rise of Nations: Thrones and Patriots	Microsoft	Autumn 2004 ●
Rome: Total War	Activision	Spring 2004 ●
Ryzom	TBA	Winter 2004 ●
Sacred	Ascaron	Arpil 2004 ●
Sam & Max 2	Activision	TBA
Settlers Of Catan	Capcom	2004 ●
Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami	2004 ●
Sniper Elite	Wanadoo	Autumn 2004 ●
Soldiers	Codemasters	Winter 2004 ●
Soldner: Secret Wars	Bigben	Winter 2004 ●
Spells of Gold	Oxygen	Autumn 2004 ●
S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Oblivion Lost	THQ	Winter 2004 ●
Starship Troopers	Empire	Christmas 2004 ●
Star Wars: Battlefront	LucasArts	Spring 2004 ●
Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	Winter 2004 ●
Supremecy: Four Paths To Power	Strategy First	Autumn 2004 ●
Team Fortress 2	Vivendi	TBA ●
The Bard's Tale	Acclaim	October 2004 ●
The Longest Journey 2	Funcom	TBA ●
The Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle Earth	Electronic Arts	Winter 2004 ●
The Lord of the Rings: Middle-Earth Online	Vivendi	Summer 2004 ●
The Matrix Online	Atari	Spring 2004 ●
The Movies	Activision	2004 ●
The Playboy Mansion	Ubi Soft	TBA ●
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Autumn 2004 ●
Thief	Eidos	2004 ●
Tribes Vengeance	Vivendi	Late 2004 ●
Total Annihilation 2	Phantagram	Autumn 2004 ●
Two Thrones	Strategy First	2004 ●
UEFA 2004	EA	Winter
Unreal Warfare	Atari	TBA
Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines	Activision	Autumn 2004 ●
Warhammer Online	Sega	Autumn 2004 ●
Warlords Battlecry 3	Enlight	TBA
World of Warcraft	Vivendi	December 2004 ●
X2: Online Universe	Koch	Spring 2004 ●

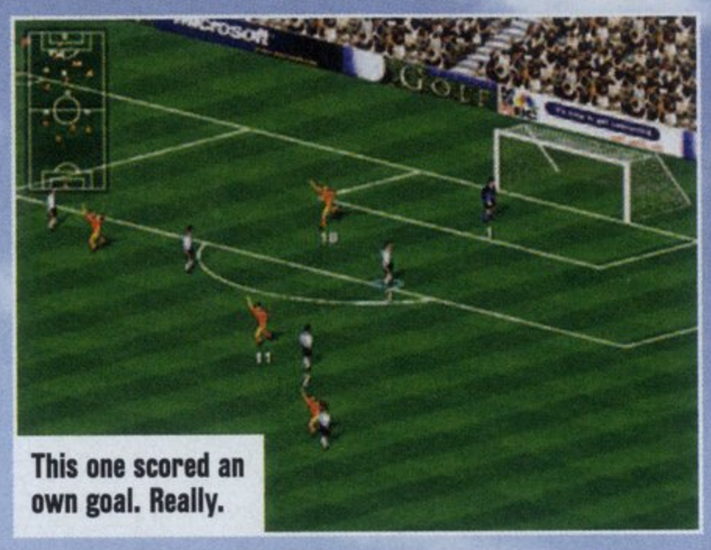
SPECIAL NEWS REPORT

WHAT HAS BILL GATES

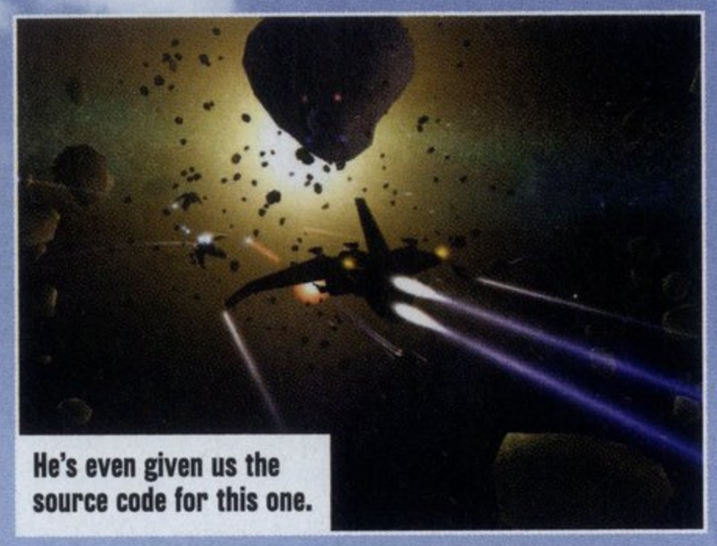
That's 'Sir' Bill Gates to you, you republican wannabes.

By KIERON GILLEN

Sir Bill Gates? Well, not quite. As a citizen of the rebel colonies, Bill only gets to have 'KBE' after his name rather than the 'Sir' prefix, but his appointment as Knight Commander of the British Empire has still raised more than a few eyebrows. Our (or the Brit's for you republicans) beloved hereditary dictator The Queen is to bestow this honour on Gates later this year because of his influence on business growth in Britain, but does the richest man in the world really deserve the same sort of lofty recognition as someone like Donald Bradman? Before you reject the idea out of hand, at least consider it. We have. Here are a few things that Bill Gates and Microsoft have done for gaming.



This one scored an own goal. Really.


He's even given us the source code for this one.

The DirectX Cut

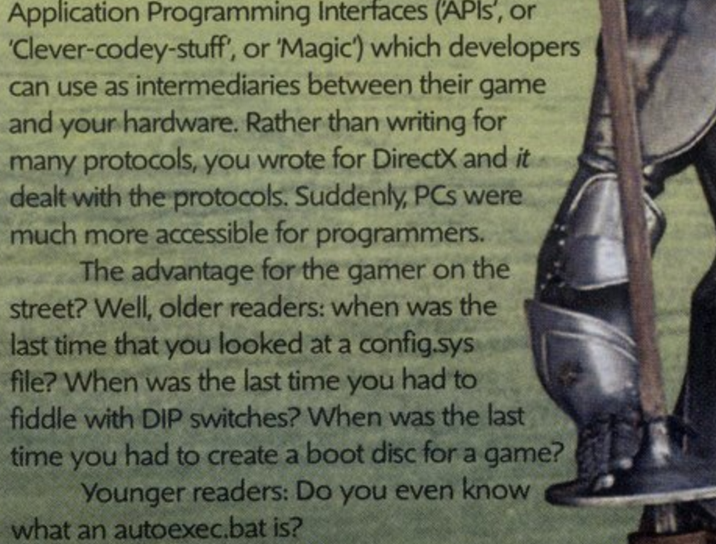
Some would point to the 3D card as the single biggest leap in the last decade of PC gaming. More discerning observers save that honour for Microsoft's 1995 introduction of DirectX. With that one step, everything changed. Yes, we already had a perfectly good 3D graphics system in OpenGL, but DirectX is a lot more than just Direct3D, and it's here that it gains our respect.

Before DirectX, developers had to access hardware directly. If your hardware wasn't on the approved list, the game wouldn't run on your machine. DirectX consists of a number of Application Programming Interfaces ('APIs', or 'Clever-codey-stuff', or 'Magic') which developers can use as intermediaries between their game and your hardware. Rather than writing for many protocols, you wrote for DirectX and *it* dealt with the protocols. Suddenly, PCs were much more accessible for programmers.

The advantage for the gamer on the street? Well, older readers: when was the last time that you looked at a config.sys file? When was the last time you had to fiddle with DIP switches? When was the last time you had to create a boot disc for a game?

Younger readers: Do you even know what an autoexec.bat is?

Put simply, you have DirectX to thank for the fact that your answer to those questions is either "Huh?" or "A very long time ago". Without DirectX, modern PC gaming wouldn't be possible.


And why is London Zoo always skint then?

Interface Facts

Which brings us to the operating system DirectX relies upon. Yes, Linux is more stable. Yes, MacOS is prettier. Yes, BeOS has a funnier name that makes us think of '50s Be-bop singers. But games are a mass market form and Windows is nothing *but* the mass market.

Without a Graphical User Interface (GUI), PC gaming would never have been as accessible as it is today. Windows has never been perfect, but it has improved with each version. Windows allows us to simply left click an icon to start a game, instead of typing stuff at a flashing cursor according to an exact, taxing syntax. No matter how it may annoy you at times, it's worth imagining what life would be like without it.

Cheap as Chips

While you're at it, start imagining what life would be like if PCs cost as much as Macs. Historically, Microsoft chose to sell just software, and not the machine you needed to run it on, as opposed to Apple, who sold beautiful, hermetically sealed universes of hardware and software. And that led directly to the affordability of the PC.

I'll hand over the story to author and programmer Neal Stephenson, who noted the following in his essay 'In the Beginning was the Command Line'. "When Windows came out, and brought the GUI to a much larger market, the hardware regime changed: the cost of colour video cards and high-resolution monitors began to drop, and is dropping still." He continues: "This free-for-all approach to hardware meant that Windows was unavoidably clunky compared to MacOS. But the GUI brought computing to such a vast audience that volume went way up and prices collapsed. Meanwhile Apple, which so badly wanted a clean, integrated OS with video neatly integrated into processing hardware, had fallen far behind in market share, at least partly because their beautiful hardware cost so much."

He later concludes: "Microsoft refused to go into the hardware business, insisted on making its software run on hardware that anyone could build, and thereby created the market conditions that allowed hardware prices to plummet."

The PC has become available to all. When I was a teenage punk-kid in Stafford, there was absolutely no way I could afford a PC. If I was in the same family, in the same social stratum today, I probably could.

Hall of Game

What was the last bad game that Microsoft published? We've got to go back to the first games they released to get a real abomination. True, back then actual journalistic laughter greeted such games as *Microsoft Soccer* when they were unveiled, but Microsoft learned quickly. After that false start, there's nothing genuinely embarrassing in their back catalogue. The last games to get even a mildly negative review were the *Asheron's Call* expansion pack *Dark Majesty*, and *Zoo Tycoon*. Otherwise, it's quality all the way.

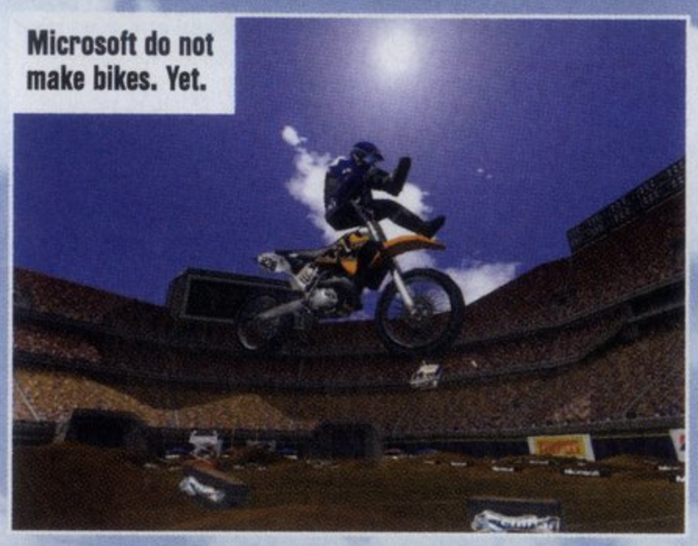
Freelancer. *Mechwarrior IV* and *Mercenaries*. Both *Age of Empires* and *Age of Mythology*. *Dungeon Siege*. *Midtown Madness*. *Allegiance*. *Links*. *Asheron's Call* and its sequel. *Combat Flight Simulator*. *Microsoft Train Simulator*. *Crimson Skies*. *Impossible Creatures*. *Motocross Madness*. *Urban Assault*. *Close Combat II* and *III*. *Rise of Nations*. There's a lot of critical accalaim from not only PCGA, but also our competitors for the games in that list. In fact, in terms of PC games, Microsoft may currently be the most consistent publisher on Earth.

The Intellimouse Sleeps Tonight

Microsoft's software dominance occasionally overshadows their success as peripheral vendors. The Intellimouse is a genuine classic. Its introduction of the

EVER DONE FOR US?

Dungeon Siege. A graphics lover's *Nethack.*



Microsoft do not make bikes. Yet.

Would the lightsaber be as shiny without Bill's cash?

scroll-wheel led to unprecedentedly easy web-browsing, invisibly smooth zooming in RTS games and the swift appearance of terminal RSI in your over-taxed index finger.

Similarly, Sidewinder gamepads were among the first to gain general popularity amongst most of our staff. While other pads often feel like they've been constructed from re-purposed shopping bags, Microsoft's tend to be so hefty you could brutalise a burglar with one. Even experimental models like the Battle Commander were at least innovative and... Man! This is starting to sound like a Microsoft business catalogue. Look, they did some good games hardware, OK? In fact, as I look down at my own desktop I find that I have a grubby, well-worn Intellimouse lurking beneath my fingertips right now.

"WHY HAVEN'T YOU INSTALLED LINUX YET?"

The History of Flight

If there's one Microsoft game that deserves to be considered on its own merits, it's *MS Flight Sim.* Why? For the dual reasons that a) its origins are completely separate from Microsoft's later work as a games publisher, and b) C'mon. It's not really a game. It's possibly even more important than that.

The original *Flight Simulator* arrived on the Apple II in 1979, in full four-colour-o-vision, and it wasn't until 1982 that it crossed over to the PC as *FS 1.0.* It has lived and evolved under Microsoft's auspices ever since. While total conversions for other games have been released occasionally, *Microsoft Flight Simulator* birthed a whole industry devoted exclusively to increasingly obscure aircraft models, detailed texture maps of Luxembourg and keeping Tim Stone in freelance work as the only man in the world who can review them properly.

It has also kept hundreds of thousands of people who aren't even slightly interested in *Doom 3* playing on the PC for 20 years and, in the process, helped give PC gaming a patina of professionalism that other platforms simply don't have.

Mine!

Ahem, so actually, there are *three* Microsoft games which deserve to be considered on their own merits. While *Flight Sim* took the highbrow, *Solitaire* and *Minesweeper* took the everyman approach. If you've ever worked on a Windows system – and obviously, you have – you've played one or the other of these perfectly pure videogames at some point in your life.

The word is 'entryism', and in those terms the only real peer of *Solitaire* and *Minesweeper* is *Tetris.* It says it all that when writing this article I opened up *Minesweeper* to check a couple of facts... and found myself losing half an hour to its clutches. How many PC gamers started their gaming careers in similar situations? This many: many.

He Really Annoys Geeks

When I messaged associates to tell them I was working on this feature, I could almost hear the scream of their responses via the medium of text. How dare I? The man's a monster! With horns and stompy patent-stealing feet and a monopoly on towering thrones made of the skulls of children and WHY HAVEN'T YOU INSTALLED LINUX YET?

Independently-minded, anti-authoritarian underground punk-coders don't like Gates. They believe the world should be run to an entirely different system of values, and fighting against an oppressive, incredibly rich corporation (like Neuromancer, dude!) is glorious motivation. If the other folks are the bad guys, well now, what does that make you? It makes you a *hero.*

Lots of good things come out of people wanting to 'defeat' Bill Gates. As a pantomime villain, he serves his purpose.

Boxing Clever

And finally, the Xbox. A good thing for gamers generally, perhaps, bringing such advances as the first decent console broadband service, but beneficial for *PC* gamers? Oh yes.

Videogames are expensive to make. They're getting more expensive every year. While the revenues for games are also increasing, they're not doing so at the same rate. Even sizeable sales can end in loss if you've spent too much on production. Unfortunately, to make a game look good today you're *required* to spend a lot on production. This isn't a problem for the well-funded mega-titles such as *Half-Life 2* or *Doom 3*, as they gain enough sales on PC alone to cover their budgets, but for other games that aren't assured of cleaning up, the situation is infinitely more problematic.

The answer is multi-formatting. The closer the two different platforms are in terms of capability and design, the higher the likelihood of a game that will be worthy of both of them. The critics of *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War* should consider what those games would have been like if they were co-developed for the PS2 instead of the Xbox. Cheers, Bill.

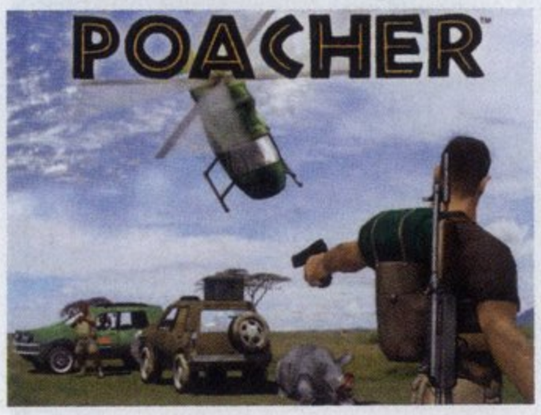
THIS MONTH IN GAMES

WELCOME TO OUR GENRE-SPECIFIC NEWS SECTION, FEATURING ALL THE MONTH'S HIGHLIGHTS. DIGEST, THEN SHOOT AN EMAIL TO US AT **pcga@derwenthoward.com.au** TO HAVE YOUR SAY.

THE MONTH IN FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

■ Craig Pearson

ANIMAL hunting takes up the bulk of my FPS trawl this month. First, the traditional sort: *Poacher* is a 'game' where you hunt down the world's most endangered species and kill them. For fun. This horrendously un-PC PC game blends elements of resource management, where you use the money from your kills to buy hunting equipment, with brutal bloodsport. You journey from the Congo to the South American rainforests, hunting game and dodging the wardens nobly trying to protect these animals. Having had a look over some screenshots, it looks pretty feeble, and graphically laughable. It will probably suit the sort of people who found *Postal 2* a blast.



"YOU JOURNEY FROM THE CONGO TO THE SOUTH AMERICAN RAINFOREST, HUNTING GAME."

However, on my travels I also stumbled upon a Russian-developed FPS, the oddly named *WehrWolf*. As all the information is in Ruskie, it's a difficult game to comprehend, but the blurb namechecks *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honour*. It's looking like a typical FPS, but the grass in the screenshots is impressive enough.

For anyone who's nabbed the *UT2004* demo off our discs and yet to buy the game, hidden in the depths of the code is a list of every single map the full game contains. So, for the record, there are 105 of the blighters, including all the *UT2003* variants. The demo itself also offers you a chance to try out bot voice commands, so anyone with a headset and microphone combo can humiliate themselves by speaking to no-one. Over and out.

Further Links

www.dgames.ru/project.php?mode=1000&id_prod=30
■ *Wehrwolf*? Here wolf.
www.forumplanet.com/planetunreal/topic.asp?fid=3711&tid=1290991
■ That *UT* map list.

THE MONTH IN ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

■ Ross Atherton

IN order to maintain my grumpy old man image, it's become essential to foster some pet hates. One of these is silly game names – you know the ones: not enough vowels and too many subtitles. So when I learned of Danish developers Peroxide's new game, I instantly felt all warm and fuzzy towards them. *Era* is a defiantly single-player RPG, which they openly admit is a tribute to *Ultima V*, a game generally agreed to be one of the best of that series. Using a proprietary engine to create a lush world (pictured), *Era*'s details are a little scant but I have high hopes for the end of the year.

"YET ANOTHER RUSSIAN RPG... DO THEY GROW THEM IN VAST BIO-FACTORIES OR SOMETHING?"

Power of Law may sound like Rebellion's latest flexing of their Judge Dredd licence, but in fact it's yet another Russian RPG. Do they grow them in vast government-run bio-factories or something? This one is a visually impressive blend of tactical combat with role-playing aspects, and developers Mistland have clearly been playing a lot of *Deus Ex* given the preponderance of the word 'cyberpunk' on their site. You're on the side of law, and your paramilitary character Katrin must tackle such missions as dealing with riots and taking down notorious criminals. The Russian version is already complete; the appearance of an English version on our shores depends on a canny publisher picking it up. We'll see.

The PS2-and-PC remake of *The Bard's Tale* is still aiming for a very tongue-in-cheek take on RPG stereotypes. Even successfully completed quests will often turn out for the worse – with, it says here, hilarious consequences. It sounds ambitious and I hope it works.

Further Links

www.mistgames.ru/polgame//eng
■ More Russian cyberpunkery.
www.peroxide.dk/era
■ Now *that's* a snappy title.

THE MONTH IN ACTION-ADVENTURE GAMES

■ Tim Edwards

BACK in the '90s, LucasArts were unstoppable. For adventure game fans, their name is still revered. The original games they produced, including *Day of the Tentacle*, *Grim Fandango* and *Sam & Max Hit the Road* (pictured) were simply incredible, layered with complex, brilliantly woven storylines and lashings of hyper-surreal humour. Their output killed the genre: they were so good that there was no point in anyone else trying.

***"URU: AGES BEYOND MYST* COULD HAVE HERALDED A NEW AGE IN ADVENTURE GAMING."**

And don't their fans know it. LucasArts have the most ardent and creative fans of any videogame company. For your homework this month, we demand you trawl MixnMojo, the LucasArts fan hub. In there you'll find all the material you'll need, from re-recordings of the *Grim Fandango* original scores (complete with lovingly designed CD covers) to brand new *Monkey Island* web comics.

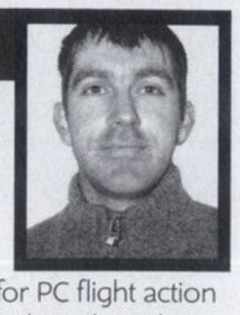
Sadder news this month for online adventure gamers. Although we panned the single-player portion, *URU: Ages Beyond Myst* could have heralded a new age in adventure gaming: co-operative puzzle solving. But, it's over. In a statement the Cyan Worlds team explained the reasons for the closing of *URU Live*: "Even with all of the time, money, resources, code, people, sweat and heart that were poured into *Uru Live*, we needed a certain number of subscribers to pay the bills. We didn't get there." You killed it. Bad gamers.

Further Links

www.mixnmojo.com
■ The hub of all online LucasArts fan trickery. Enjoy.
http://mystworlds.ubi.com/US/About/SignUp.htm
■ Sniff. Cyan Worlds mourn the passing of the *Age Beyond Myst*.

THE MONTH IN SIMULATION GAMES

■ Tim Stone



"THERE is no market for PC flight action games unless they are rigorously realistic." – the depressingly defeatist words of Larry Holland in a recent online post-mortem of his own title *Secret Weapons Over Normandy*.

Is he right? I think not. While it's impossible not to sympathise with Larry's sense of frustration at the narrow-minded way *SWON* was treated in many reviews and forum discussions ("they have evaluated it as a flight simulation, even though it was clearly not intended to be one") it's also tempting to observe that, because a fair portion of the blame for the game's undeservedly cool reception can be laid at the door of its creators, sweeping generalisations about the state of the genre are not all that useful.

"SWEEPING GENERALISATIONS ABOUT THE STATE OF THE GENRE ARE NOT THAT USEFUL."

SWON is fast, furious, accessible and atmospheric – a marvellous little game – but it isn't the spiritual successor to *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* that fans naturally expected, and the wider world of gaming sorely needs. If it hasn't sold in large numbers to PC-equipped punters, I'd argue that's not because it isn't "rigorously realistic" (although there were compromises due to cross-platform development), but down to a conceptual timidity profoundly out of step with today's genre-blurring, freedom-celebrating, chart-toppers.

There *is* a market for PC flight action games that aren't rigorously realistic, but they *must* bring new ideas, perspectives, and play possibilities to the table.

Further Links

http://actionvault.ign.com/features/den/swonwrap.shtml
■ Larry's *SWON* song in full.
www.thunder-works.com
■ Skyhawks over San Carlos Water sadly some way off.

THE MONTH IN MULTI-PLAYER/ONLINE GAMES

■ Mark Sutherns

FOR me this month will always be remembered for the first glorious cries of "Vehicular Manslaughter" (see the *UT2004* demo for more essential phrases of mass destruction) and, sadly,

the first indications that the swollen MMORPG genre is nearing bursting point. You can read more about the abrupt cancellation of *Mythica* in Netgamer this month, while wee Tim has already scooped the story of the demise of *Uru*, the cheeky young scamp. Even the prospect of free online play failed to save that one. Who'd have thought it?

"THE FIRST INDICATATIONS THAT THE SWOLLEN MMORPG GENRE IS NEAR BURSTING POINT."

I can just imagine the countless MMO developers now sweating over their spreadsheets. At least Origin, currently hard at work on *Ultima X*, had another distraction this month. The latest virus on the loose, a little darling named Bagle.B, has been linked to an *Ultima Online* fanatic. The virus includes references to the game's messenger channel as well as links to a number of game sites. A dirty protest from a nerfed necromancer, perhaps?

Oh, and slap me on the wrist for failing to mention that *Star Wars Galaxies* players have been mollified in recent months, with additional vehicles opening up new possabilities throughout the universe. Typically, Sony couldn't *quite* get things to run smoothly - an early bug with vehicle storagelead to pile-ups of decaying speeders and swoop bikes outside starports. The park-and-ride system might have failed, but rumours of a new traffic warden profession have yet to be confirmed.

Further Links

www.petitiononline.com/savelive/petition.html
■ Fans refuse to let *Uru* rest in peace. Clearly they're feeling all *Mysty*-eyed.
www.swgalaxies.net
■ A masterful *SWG* fansite.

THE MONTH IN STRATEGY GAMES

■ Mark Donald

THE online matchmaking service that is Battle.net is brilliant. Blizzard's technology is years ahead of its time. The problem is the users: a dirty bunch forever looking for an unfair

advantage, be it through cheating or exploiting gaps in the system. Enter BnetD, an open-source alternative, developed by enthusiasts desperate for a level playing field. Predictably, Blizzard aren't too happy, and have taken to showering the group responsible with legal letters. The legal defence, including ripostes to Blizzard's allegations can be read at the Electronic Frontier Foundation's website. Perfect lazy afternoon reading material.

"THE REAL-TIME ASSAULT ON FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS CONTINUES THIS MONTH..."

On the same "it looks just like it, but isn't" theme, check out *UFO: Alien Invasion*, an *X:COM* knock-off filtered through the ageing *Quake II* engine. The good news is the multi-player support: you can play with or against your friends, in straight deathmatches or co-operative frag-fests. It's on the cover disc this month. Go play.

The real-time assault on first-person shooters continues this month with the release of an RTS mode for *Operation Flashpoint* (pictured). Right now this is just a curiosity, a programming triumph. To get it to work you'll need to download an APC's worth of add-ons, and own a copy of *Operation Flashpoint: Resistance*. When you finally get it up and running, you're in for a treat. The enormous levels of *OpFap* are perfect landscapes for squad-level strategy. Keep an eye on this one.

Further Links

www.eff.com
■ The thorn in the side of a chequebook legal system?
www.aggression.org/karr.html
■ *Operation Flashpoint* bootcamp: first stop for all your modern combat needs.

THE INSIDER

JUST DESERTS FOR *BATTLEFIELD: 1942*?

Baldur's Gate fans rejoice, or at least quaff a significant amount of ale. We can reveal that Atari and Interplay have come to a somewhat amicable agreement over D&D rights to the third *Baldur's Gate* game. Interplay originally obtained a preliminary injunction to stop termination of the game licence, and Atari responded with a counterclaim, but both parties have now reached an agreement without the need for more serious court time. Fingers crossed, this could be a way forward for the third installment of *Baldur's Gate*.

EA recently announced that they'll publish both *TimeSplitters* and *Burnout 3* for console. With their trend of publishing on multiple formats, this means we could well be seeing one or both of these games popping up on the PC soon. EA have also just announced a deal with Marvel. The plans are to use established Marvel superheroes up against newly created EA fighters in one-on-one fighting games.

Finally, DICE have signed up Trauma Studios, the creators of *BF1942* mod *Desert Combat*. This Gulf War-based mod was one of the reasons so many fans got into *BF1942*. They'll be collaborating on one of DICE's 'previously announced projects'. Could we be seeing a full-on release of *Desert Combat*, or do Trauma have other plans?

'Just deserts'. Do you see? Oh, never mind.

LORDS OF THE REALM III

Yes, you too can be a stormin' Norman.

By AL BICKHAM

SIEGE MENTALITY

Laying siege to the castle at the heart of your enemy's territory is a satisfying venture. Each knight you appoint to a parcel of your land brings with him a specific army, and in this case it's downright essential that you use knights who command siege weapons.

The war of Warwick rages.

Like some scorched Devon on that?

LORDS OF THE REALM III AT A GLANCE

Publisher: Vivendi

Developer: Impressions

Genre: Strategy

Estimated Minimum System: PIII 1GHz, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card

Contact: www.impressionsgames.com

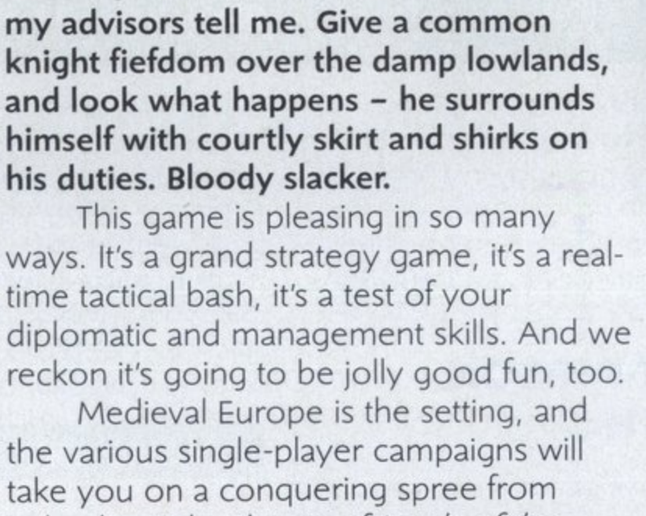
Release Date: Out now

What's in it for you? Castle-busting, bow-twanging, church-razing medieval strategy. With ugly knights.

BAH. "William of Warwick is dallying with a fair maiden, and will not move his armies," my advisors tell me. Give a common knight fiefdom over the damp lowlands, and look what happens – he surrounds himself with courtly skirt and shirks on his duties. Bloody slacker.

This game is pleasing in so many ways. It's a grand strategy game, it's a real-time tactical bash, it's a test of your diplomatic and management skills. And we reckon it's going to be jolly good fun, too.

Medieval Europe is the setting, and the various single-player campaigns will take you on a conquering spree from Ireland to Italy. Players of *Lords of the Realm II* will recognise the form, but only vaguely: the entire format has received an overhaul. The engine is far more up-to-date and refined, and the game now plonks you into actual situations from history, rather than fantastical situations set in some mythical land. That's not to say the game takes itself too seriously, however. Far from it: the whole thing has a thoroughly commendable tongue-in-cheek feel, from the truly excellent loading-screen artwork to the bulbous-nosed, heavy-browed and comically grinny knights who join your court.



He's a bad man, sire. Hire him!

"AND LET'S FACE IT, ENORMOUS SIEGE ENGINES ARE ALWAYS GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY."

You spend most of your time on the world map, which is where you decide upon your strategy. From here, you must people your counties (or 'parcels' as they're known), with your vassals. These folk come in several forms: traders, knights, serfs and men of the cloth. Each parcel contains a city, in which you install a vassal. Install a knight, for example, and an army is raised there; install a serf, and the area is given over to food production.

The idea is to get a good spread of city-types across your parcels, so you've enough food to feed your armies, enough trade-cities to bring in the coin, enough churches to keep the hoi-polloi happy and – of course – a bunch of armies to march across the country and lay siege to the enemy with.

Combat is a high point, as you can optionally zoom in on any given conflict, and control your columns of troops as they get stuck in. The beauty of this is, you are not then stuck there for the duration of the battle. You're free to flick back and forth between the slaughter and the world map, leaving your troops to do their artificially intelligent best.

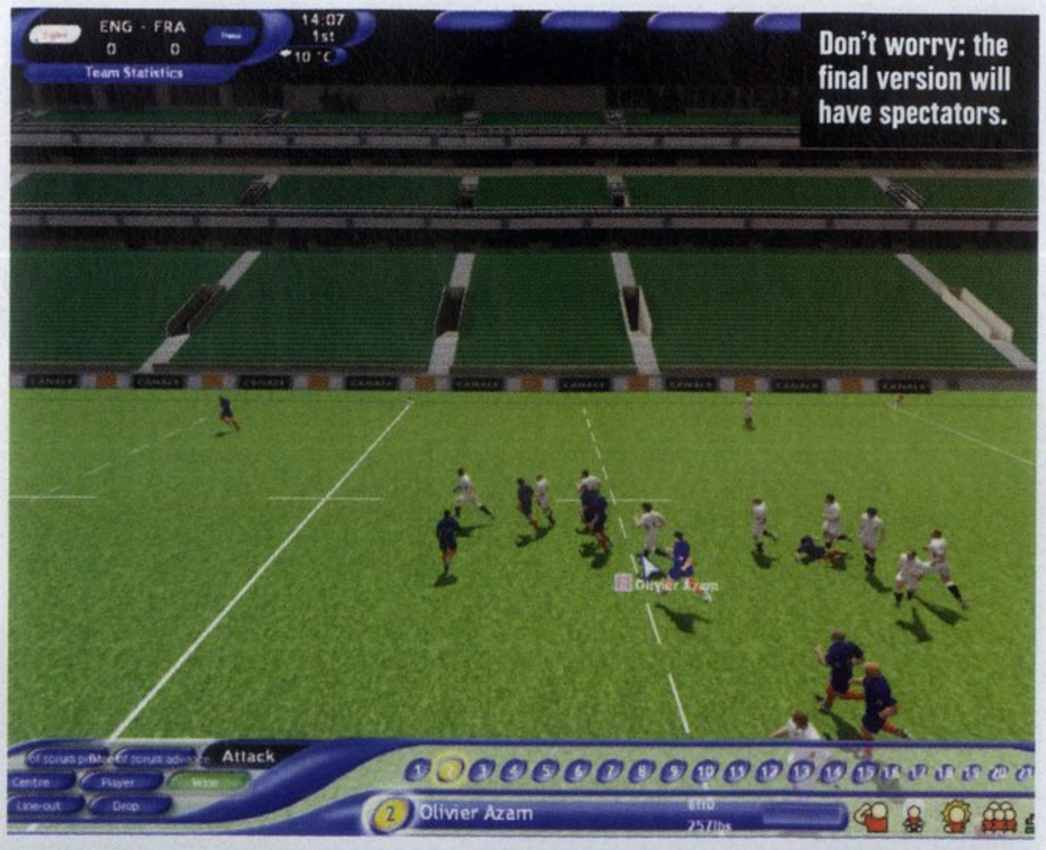
There's a surprising amount of depth to the battle sequences, too. You can set formations, arrange your ranks into effective battle-lines and engineer flanks. Castle sieges are particularly good fun, as you get to employ any ballistae, mangonets, trebuchets or other siege devices your knights may have at their disposal. And let's face it, enormous siege engines are always good value for money. While the combat side of things may not boast the technical refinement of *C&C Generals*, this is still good-looking enough, and plenty of fun to play.

So, as you may have gathered, we have high hopes for *Lords of The Realm III*. As if to taunt us, the final code arrived on our deadline, leaving us no chance to rate it, but we're sure to present you with a full review in the next issue.

PRO RUGBY MANAGER 2004

A thug's game, played by gentlemen? A madman's game, played by masochists, more like.

By ROSS ATHERTON



Don't worry: the final version will have spectators.

Crikey, how many people will this stadium fit?

NATIONAL GUARD

It'd be a poor show if, just a few months after the World Cup's dramatic conclusion, you couldn't play as any national side in any conceivable fixture. Well, you can. Part of the game's 15,000 real-life player database covers every international team, making a replayed World Cup a possibility. The Six Nations, ongoing at time of going to press, is of course on offer, but more obscure stuff such as the South African club competition make this a real international contender.

PRO RUGBY MANAGER AT A GLANCE

Publisher: Digital Jesters

Developer: Cyanide

Genre: Sports Management

Estimated Minimum System: PIII 500, 128Mb RAM

Contact: www.prorugby-manager.com

Release Date: Late March

What's in it for you? A rare chance for rugby fans to get their hands muddy.

NOW we're all grown up, there's no chance we'd risk subjecting our soft, flimsy bodies to the bone-crushing rigours of the rugby field. There comes a time in a man's life when discretion becomes the better part of valour, and the choice between a well-padded sofa and a mouthful of frozen mud becomes an obvious one.

As PC Games Addicts, however, our lust for power knows no bounds. Moreover, the half of the office which considers rugby to be a very fine sport indeed (to watch, that is) has become irked by the never-ending procession of football management games. At last we'll get the chance to control the fortunes of more than 150 real-world rugby union clubs and national sides, and even have a hand in their on-pitch performances.

Like the evergreen *Championship Manager* series, as a club manager you'll have complete financial control, buying and selling players and making improvements to your ground. Gate receipts and results will affect your cash flow, but it's in the meat of the actual matches themselves that *Pro Rugby Manager 2004* really comes into its own. Naturally, you'll have control over team selections, but in training and devising strategies you'll really be able to put your own mark on proceedings. As the matches play out in real-time, there's also the chance to change things on the fly.

Didn't realise how powerful the opposition's forwards were? Rearrange your defence to concentrate around the breakdown. Getting peppered with testing long kicks? Reposition your back three to secure possession. General tactics buttons let you impose styles of play when attacking or defending, such as slinging the ball wide in each phase or playing a kicking game when on the attack, or defending in a double curtain or attacking the centres.

If you're still reading, chances are you're a rugby fan – and let's face it, those who aren't au fait with the ovoid will swiftly lose interest. *PRM*'s narrow but very strong draw is reflected in the tentative plan of Digital Jesters, the publishers, to provide limited edition club-specific versions of the game. These would be aimed at die-hard rugby fans, for whom the lure of being in control of Gloucester, Leicester Tigers, Leinster or Stade Francais might well prove too hard to resist.

"AS THE MATCHES PLAY OUT IN REAL TIME, THERE'S THE CHANCE TO CHANGE THINGS ON THE FLY."

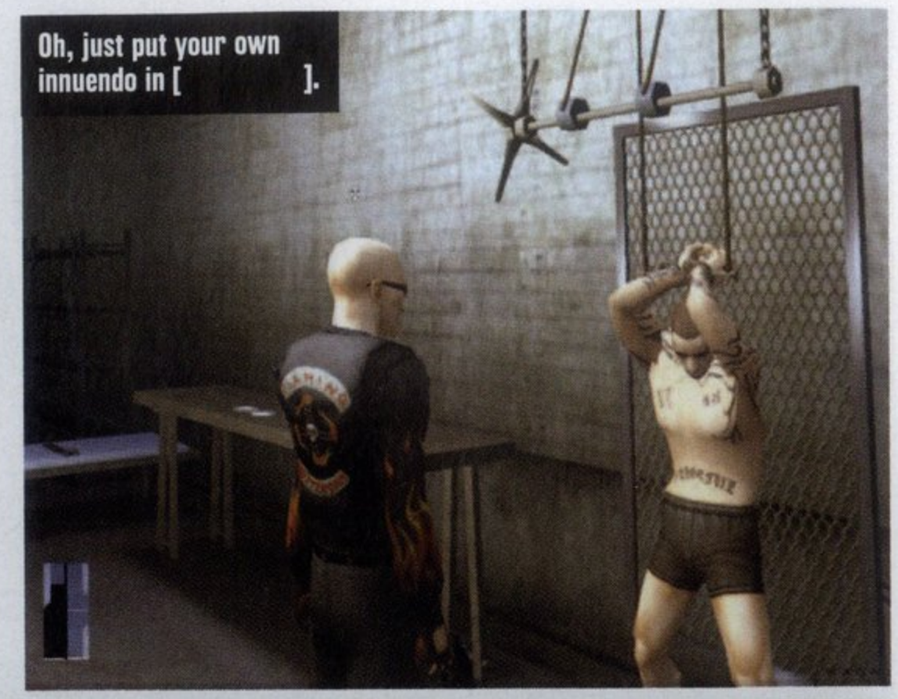
Whether this aim will leave more hardcore gamers disappointed remains to be seen.

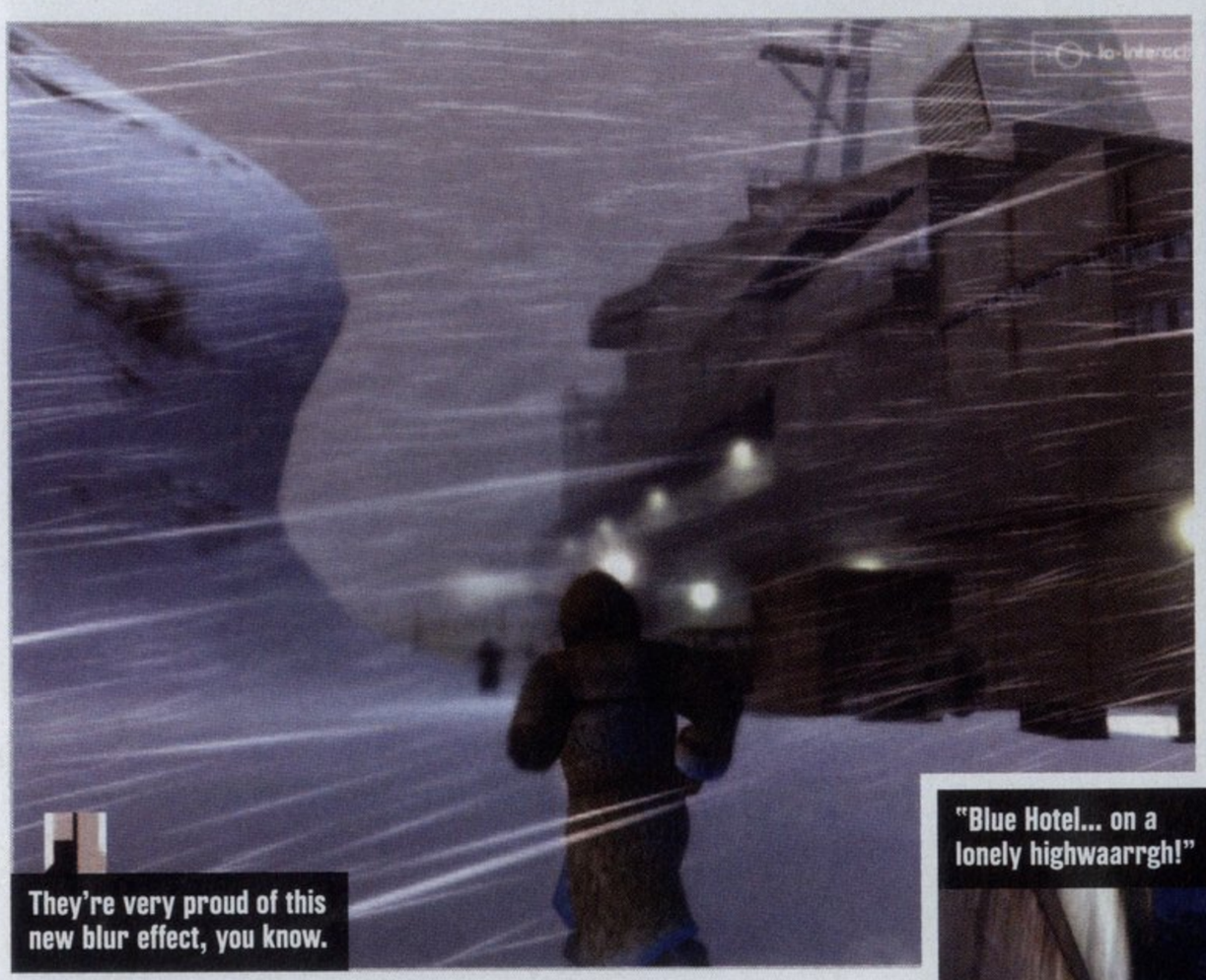
Like the world-class Australian World Cup team, *Pro Rugby Manager 2004* seems to have sufficient features to make it a pleasure for any fan, but these don't always work entirely in concert. If the slightly clunky interface and low-tech visuals are the only problems we uncover, we'll be more than happy come the game's release.

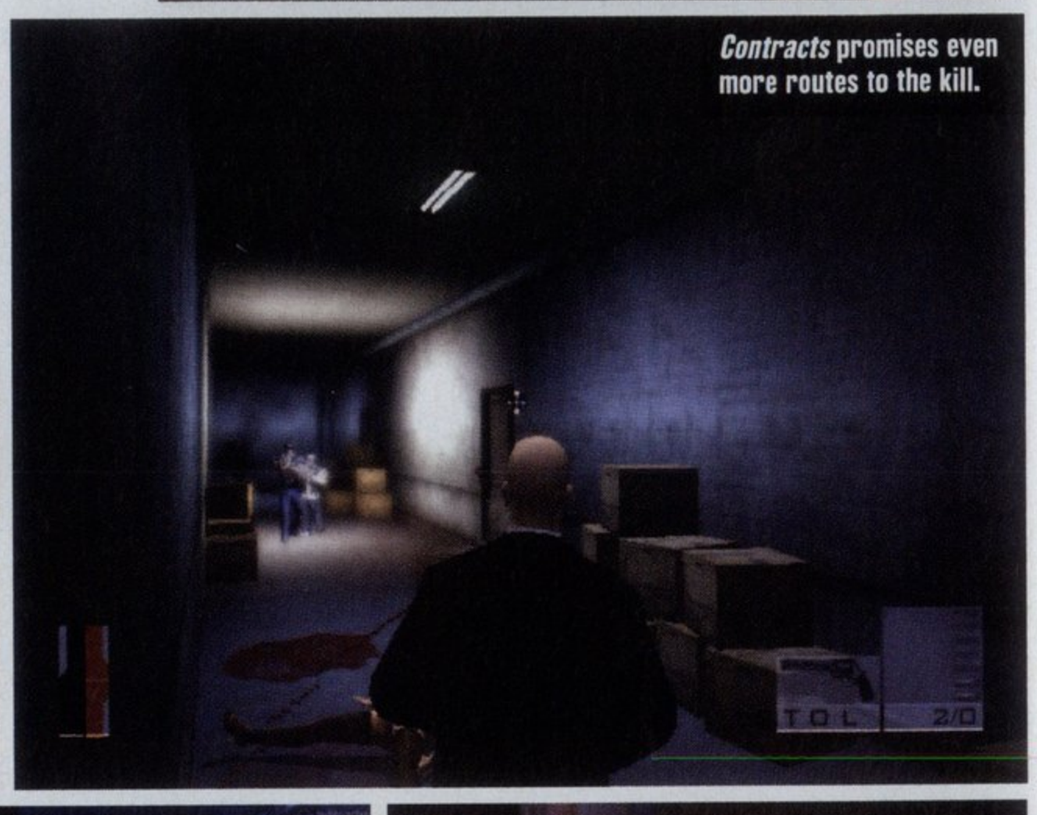
HITMAN CONTRACTS

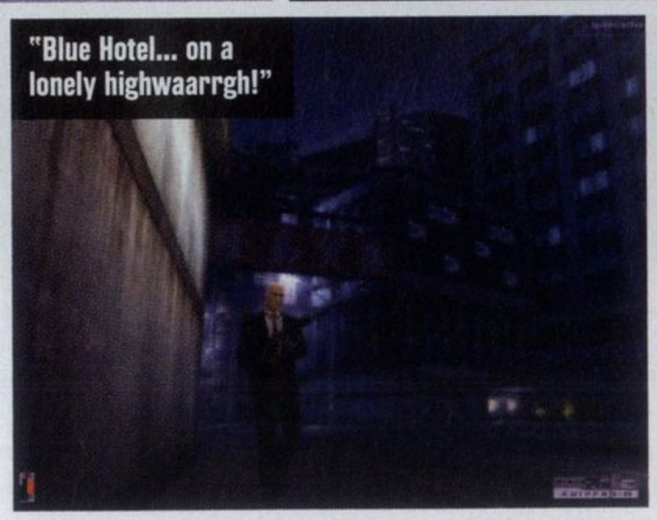
We expand.

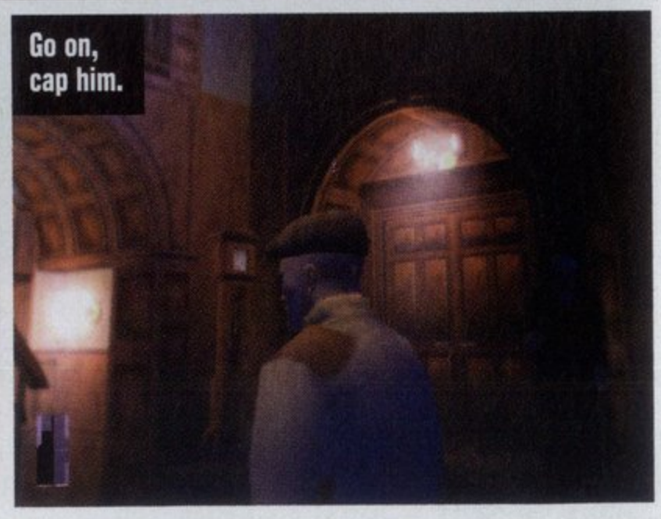
By STEVEN WILLIAMS


Oh, just put your own innuendo in [ ].


They're very proud of this new blur effect, you know.


Contracts promises even more routes to the kill.


"Blue Hotel... on a lonely highwaarrgh!"


Go on, cap him.

HITMAN CONTRACTS AT A GLANCE

Publisher: Eidos

Developer: Io Interactive

Genre: Tactical shooter

Estimated Minimum System: PIII 1GHz, 128Mb, 32Mb 3D card

Contact: www.hitmancontracts.com

Release Date: May

What's in it for you? Weapons, moves, enemies, routes, ways of killing. More of everything. Except hair.

SEX and death, the beginning and the end: entwined irrevocably like cheese and pineapple at some terrible cocktail party of the soul. But sometimes life's various beginnings and ends loom so large we forget about the in-between: life itself. And yes, repressed religious delusionals, we mean you. You won't like this. Along comes *Hitman: Contracts*, full of both extremes, in a clear attempt to delay us even further from fruitfully living the in-between. Just think, you could vacuum the stairs and walk through the rain to buy toilet paper in the time it takes to play a mission. Hey, wait! Life really sucks. Screw the in-between, let's fiddle with guns.

Obviously you've read the word '*Hitman*' and you know about the death, but sex? Hmm. Many games lay claim to 'darker, more adult' themes as the sequels build up, and mostly they convince like an ex boy-bander growing a goatee, insisting his first love was always industrial goth-core, then collapsing outside Blackmarket nightclub from a caffeine overdose the week before the single comes out. However, we've experienced some of *Hitman: Contracts*' perversions and they're proper wrong. In previous games your targets were nasty pieces of work, crime bosses and the like, but it was fairly impersonal. The worst 47 could be accused of was a certain moral flexibility... but now you're taking out the bottom one percent of humanity, and your glacial murderousness is almost angelic in its mercy. Not that the game ever apologises for the nature of its characters. Not on either side of the divide.

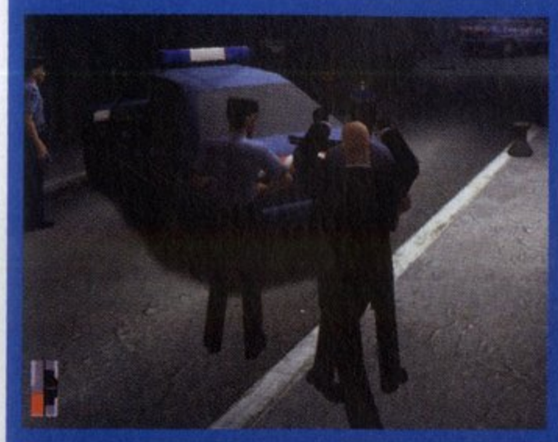
Consider this example. Early in the 12-mission ladder, you're instructed to investigate an abattoir owner arrested over the disappearance of a young girl. Your stealth skills are obviously useful in retrieving proof, if there is any, of his involvement – the girl's parents don't believe the case against him should have been dropped. The Meat King's holding a party to celebrate beating the charge, and this provides you with several ways of getting in. OK, so what? You can tack on any backstory you like with a quick cutscene, but that doesn't make any difference once you take control.

True, but darkness seeps from every surface, not just from extraneous story movies. The party – the idea of which is pretty callous in itself, as the girl is still missing – is held in the blood-painted, carcass-strewn slaughterhouse. Lovely. It's bondage themed, so everyone's wearing gimp masks. Lapdancers gyrate luridly to the music and leather girls kiss. Io Interactive are even considering retaining the chap getting his little pixel prong blown... but, as your maths teacher probably told you, you shouldn't count on it. As you shuffle deeper into the building you discover the mentally ill brother of the Meat King wandering around in just a butchers' apron and sordid Y-fronts. Turns out he's the real killer – and he's built a little shrine to the dismembered corpse strung above a lake of glistening blood...

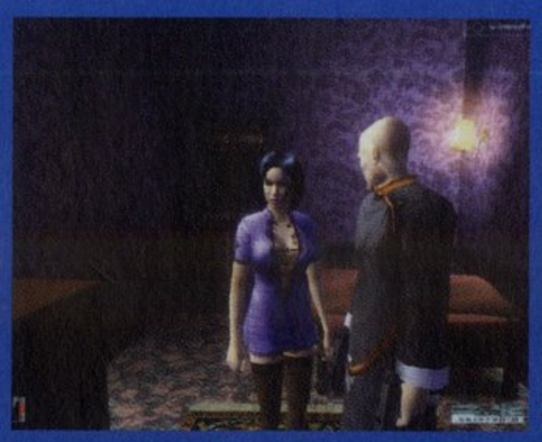
"HEY WAIT! LIFE REALLY SUCKS. SCREW THE IN-BETWEEN, LET'S FIDDLE WITH GUNS."

HIT ME SLOWLY, FANTASTIQUE...

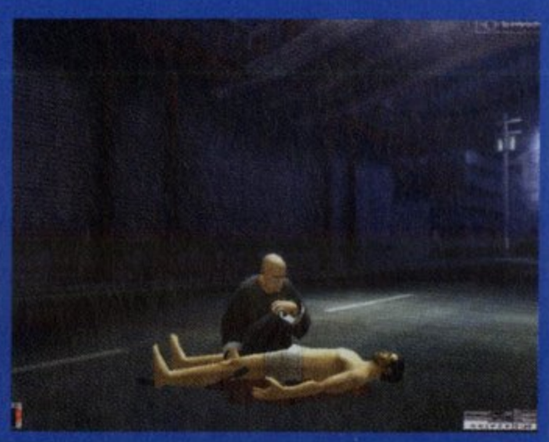
Ruthless, efficient professional killer or drooling psychopath who just wants somebody to understand/bleed for him? Whatever, 47's getting up to a lot of kinky stuff these days...



Cop killing! Policemen are famous for their sense of humour, so it's unlikely anyone will mind our assassin doing this. Ahem.

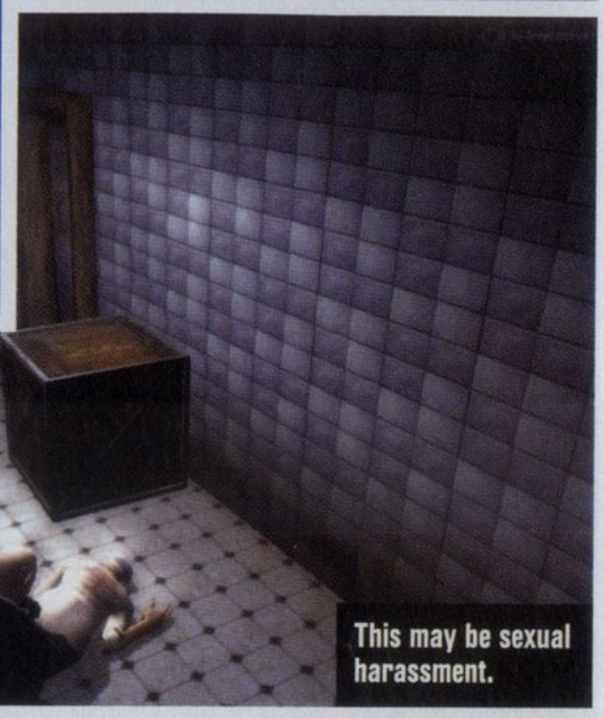


Womanising! The OFLC objected to prostitutes in *GTA* but didn't mind cop killing. Those stockings should do the trick.

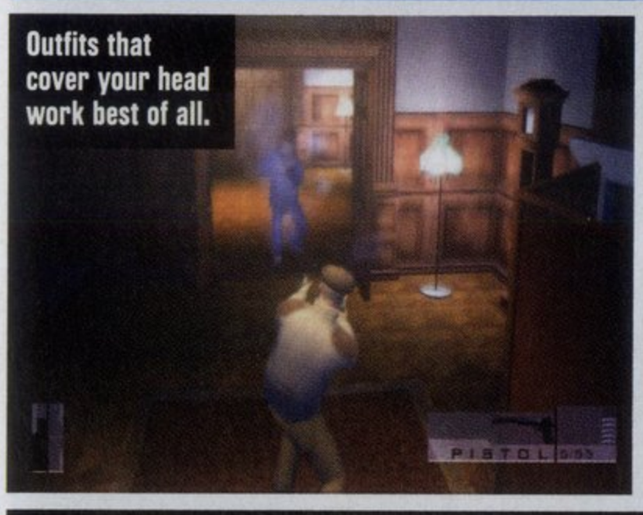


Weirding! "What? You want me to touch you where? Well, you're dead, so I guess it's OK..." Is necrophilia *really* that bad?

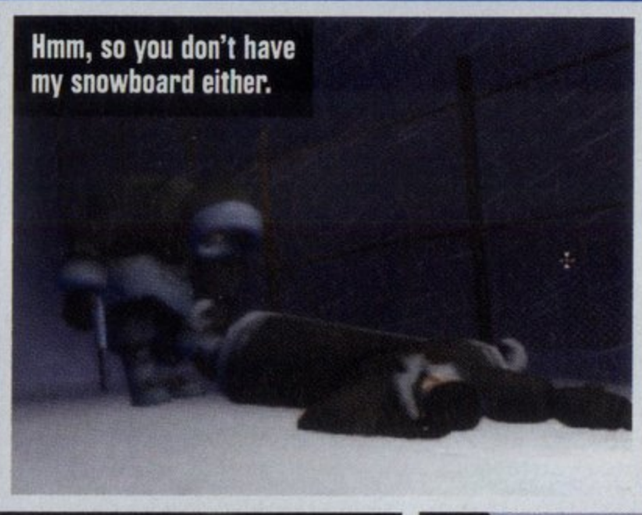
Kill snowflakes! Kill them all!



This may be sexual harassment.

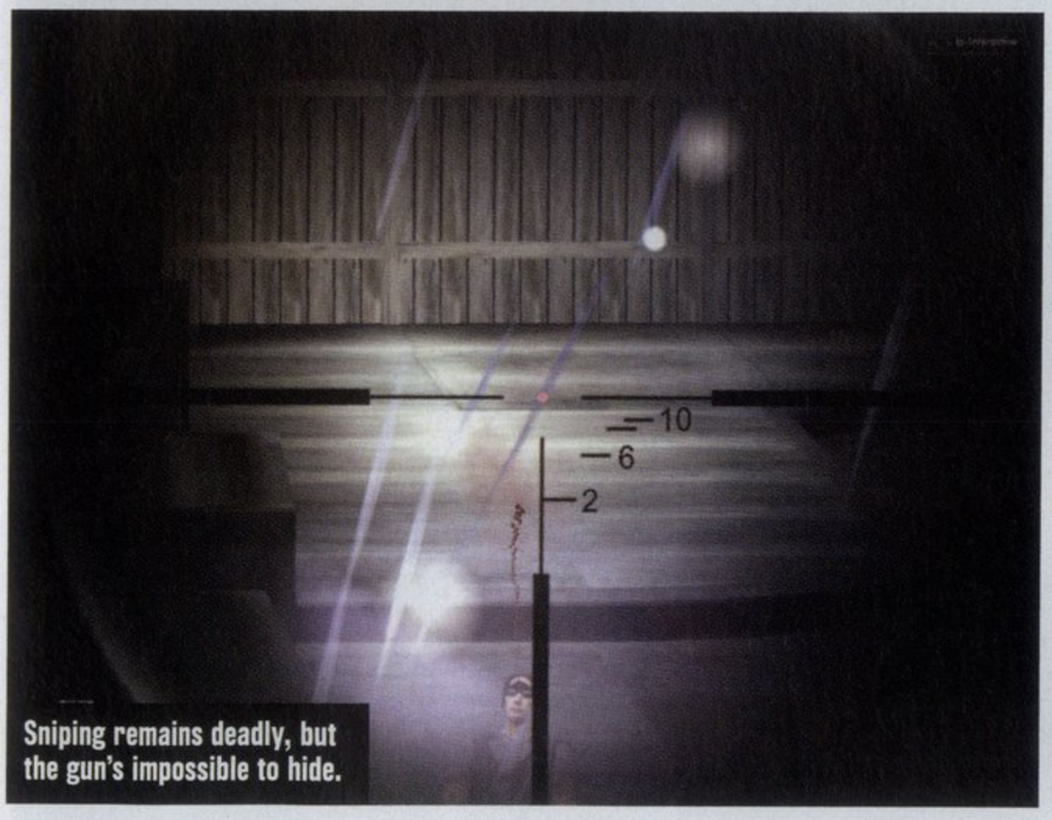


Outfits that cover your head work best of all.



Hmm, so you don't have my snowboard either.

Branson attempts to fly round the world in a submarine. And fails.



Sniping remains deadly, but the gun's impossible to hide.

Flattened on the page it sounds a bit crass, perhaps, but there are some affecting images beyond the obvious titillation. The evidence you take to show the girl was there is... her arm. After wading through opium dens of wasted gimps, you find the owner himself, grossly obese, pallid, near-naked and beached alone on a bed. Far more intriguing than a blinging, heavily-armed smoothy would be, his terminally debauched appearance is a metaphor for the entire set-up. So the dark new themes are more than just surface bruises caused as the developers – or perhaps publishers – try to kick the game into a fresher, more popular genre. No, there are little snowy bone shards sticking through from the core.

But wait, this is just one mission. It's not all sexual perversion. You may instead be called upon to whack terrorist leaders building nuclear bombs for the black market, or execute gangland bosses, or to kill off the moneyed English family who are hunting kidnapped homeless people on their castle estate... OK, so there's quite a bit of perversion, even if it's debauchery but not explicitly sexual. Bloody House of Lords, eh? You can't a conservative Pom in a bad wig alone for a minute.

You steal into this wretched world like poison unfurling in a tyrant's mouth, an avenging angel, but you're not a hero. Codename 47's extended abilities mean he's morally more ambivalent than ever. Beyond the iconic baldness, bad tie and barcode Eidos hope will cast a shadow over even Lara's unfeasible assets (vote now!) lies his amoral nature, and it's still unusual. Even *Vice City* bad-boy Tommy Vercetti has redeeming features. Mr 47 is just cold. He's almost as bad as the people he kills.

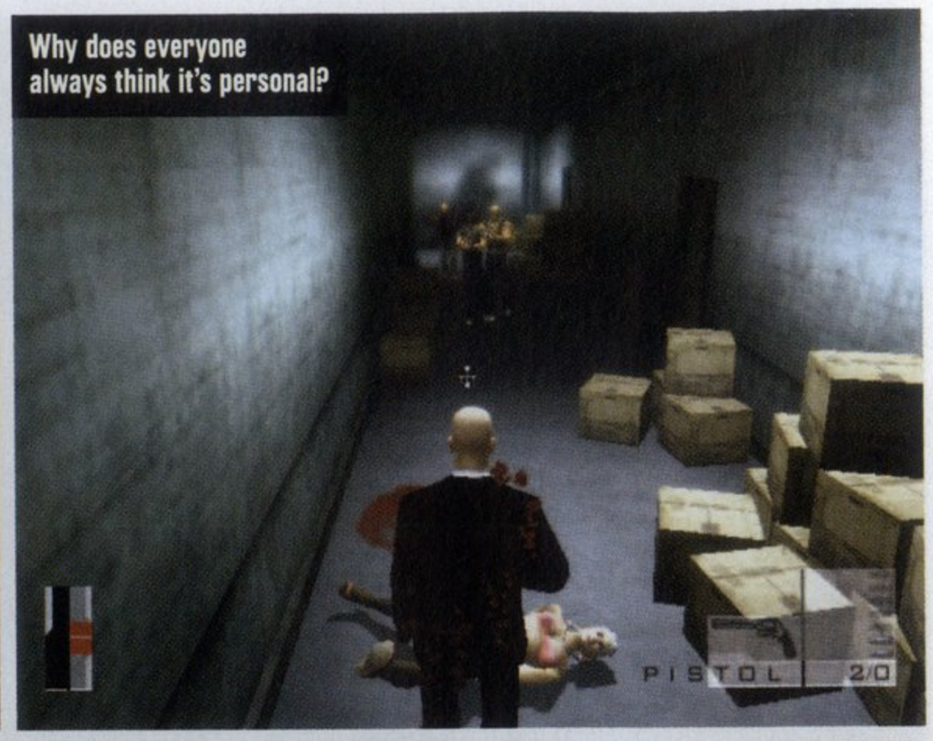
Consider this example. In that same meat-based level – called Slaughterhouse 2 in reference to Slaughterhouse 5, Kurt Vonnegut's classic novel of existential exhaustion – our boy can perform atrocities of his own. Yay! These involve one freshly killed guard, a large, S-shaped meat hook, a motorised rail currently transporting pig carcasses and a couple of switches. Time it right and you can send him round the factory to dangle in the freezer, where he won't be discovered, still hanging by his head. Shoot him as he goes and you'll see the rag-doll physics are as convincing as ever. But first, make sure you roll one of Death's condoms – a silencer – onto the end of your weapon for protection. You don't want to catch anything. Like 101 bullets to the face.

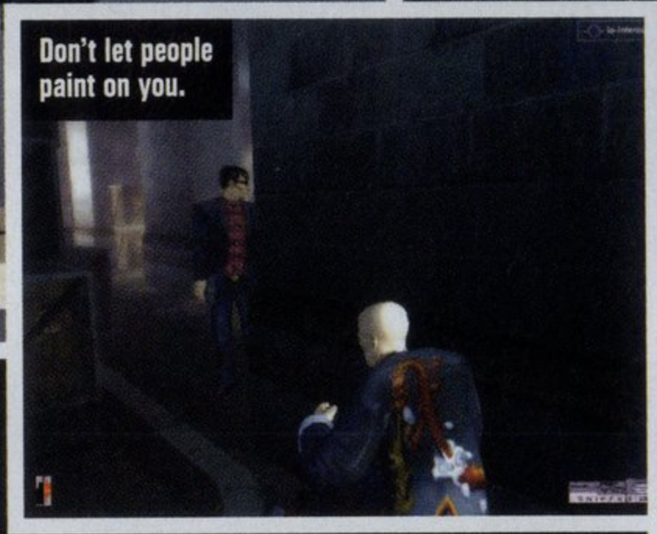
Ah ha, guns! About time. You've a fantastic array of weaponry, of course, including golden Desert Eagles inspired by Woo's Face/Off, and a hidden... well, they don't want us to tell you, but it's big, heavy, devastating and featured in the **continued over**

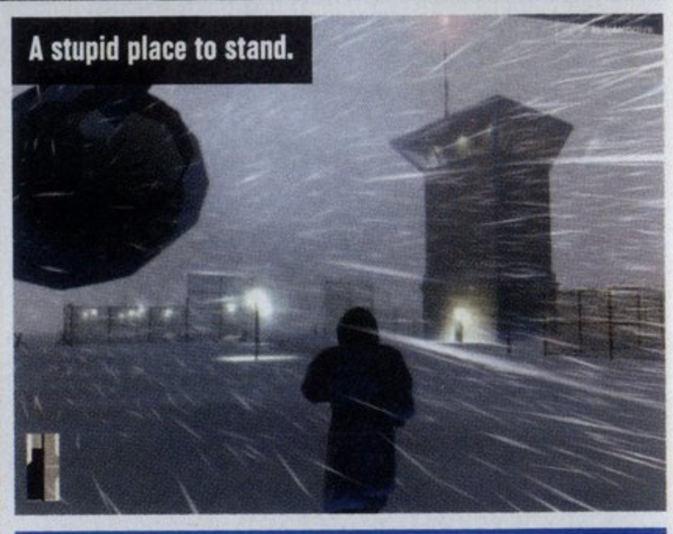
VINTAGE CLARET

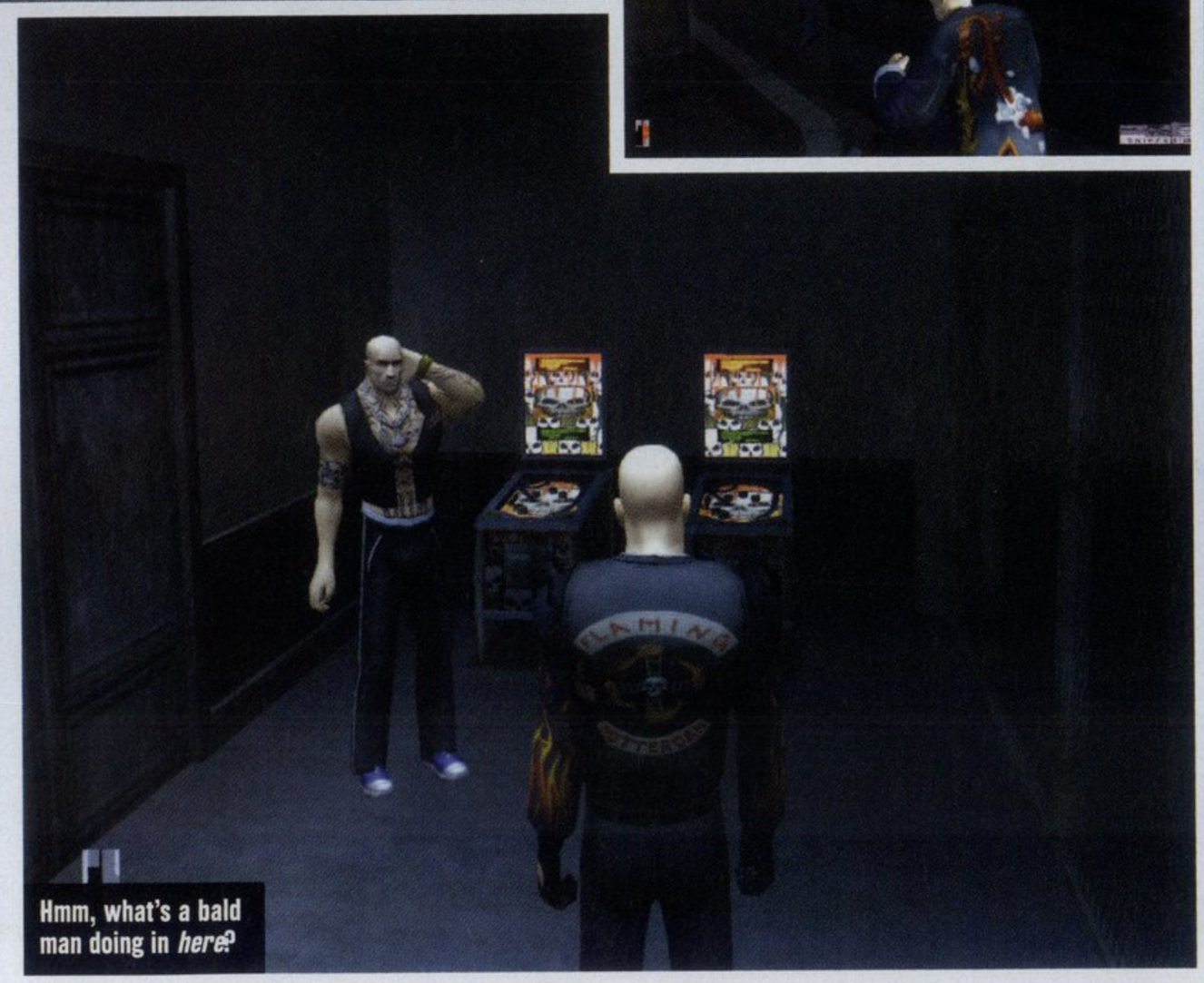
This game is not afraid of blood. Shooting people creates great ropes of the stuff, and though it won't ever ruin your suit, it leaves colossal stains. Ventilate someone at suitably close range and you'll paint the walls like some kind of murderous Pro Hart. Can you see what it is yet? Oh, of course you can't, your eyes came out.

LATEST ON...







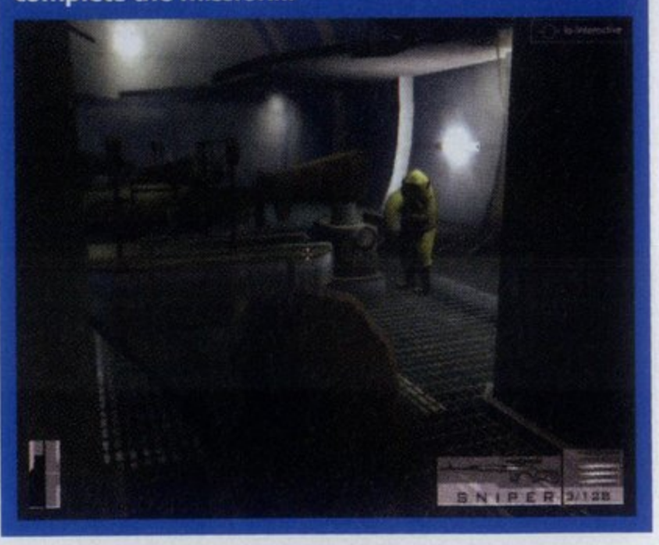


SKIN DEEP?

Io Interactive are particularly keen to point out their new graphical effects, but we're more curious about how they've been used. Motion blurring will clearly make snowstorms more difficult to navigate, and judging from these screens they'll have a significant impact on your ability to target guards – the effect wasn't working in the build we saw, so it's impossible to say. New lighting 'blooms' were also absent, but even without them the game looked most impressive, and every light can be shot out. Again, this should impact your progress, though just how enemies react to lights exploding – or how much of an advantage shadows give you – remains to be definitively seen.

CLOTHES MAKETH HITMAN

While it can often be fatal to be dressed wrongly, there are few cases more deadly than this. To enter this decommissioned Russian sub you need a radiation suit, and if you're too overt on the way in the alerted scientists will run. No suit. A grisly death if you enter. Now find another way to complete the mission...

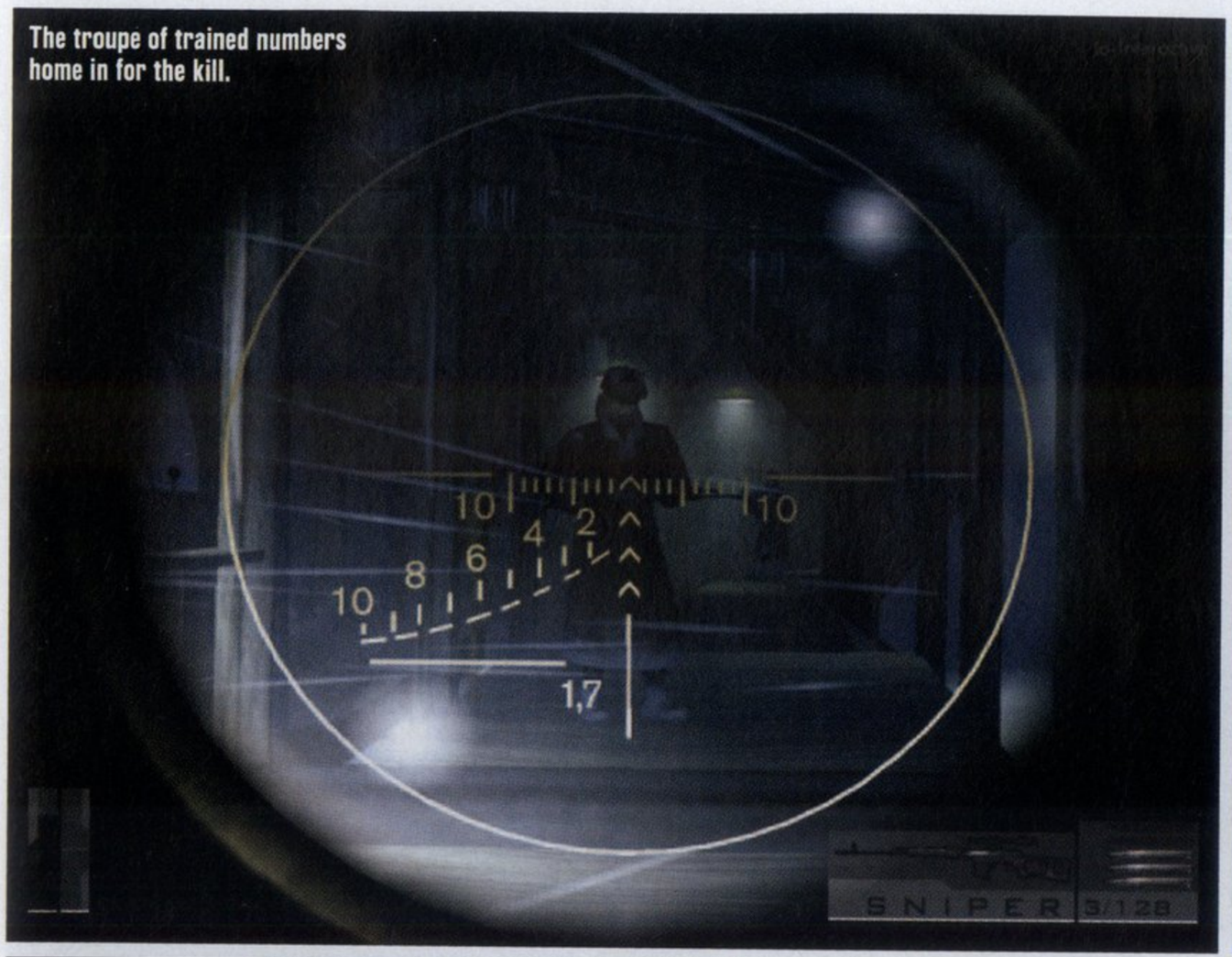


first *Hitman*. The rest is a variety of shotguns, automatic rifles, sniper rifles, machine pistols and handguns either brought by you or taken from corpses. Despite causing serious damage, the use of anything unsilenced is really a last resort. There are various ways of approaching each mission, and extreme violence is one of them, but 'going loud' at best provokes lethally numerous responses and at worst alerts the target. And if the target escapes, it's all over. So the emphasis is on quality of disguise and the depth of your patience, cunning and observation. Though entirely playable in first-person, if you approach it like a standard FPS you won't get far at all.

You could always steal any (dead) man's clothes in the previous games, but now some are more useful than others. Anything that covers your face and shiny baldy head is going to get you further, so those gimp masks are very handy – as are snow goggles and furry parkas. With some missions bearing multiple targets, there's also the option of dressing up as the important man you just killed in order to reach an even more important one... curiously, though, you still can't dress up as a woman. Why? Possibly 47 is afraid his bum will look big in it. Possibly he'd feel like an Oxford St reject. Or possibly it'd break even his cold heart to look in the mirror and see kohl streaking his cheeks as tears – tears he never even felt well up – turn to Christmas baubles on his quivering, lipstick-smeared mouth. We just can't say.

"BE SURE TO ROLL ONE OF DEATH'S CONDOMS, A SILENCER, ON THE END OF YOUR WEAPON."

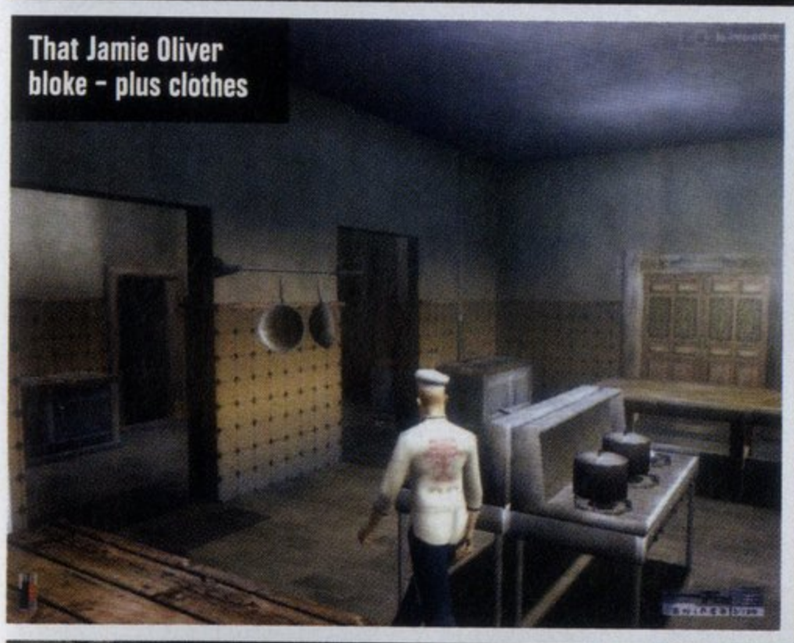
So 47 continues to bite down on such urges and at the same time becomes ever more murderous. Simpler but even more fun than guns are the personal deaths, such as with the garrotte, the meathook and the lethal injection. Or the laxative. Yes, you can spike a target's soup, wander off to the toilets and cap him as he's poised in trap three. He dies like Elvis and you get a laugh, and what's more, you're rewarded for really clean stealth kills. Garrotte a guard silently, for instance, and next time you get a new and inexorably more violent animation for it. Melee weapons also include such delights as a pool cue, poker and the high-comedy-



The troupe of trained numbers home in for the kill.

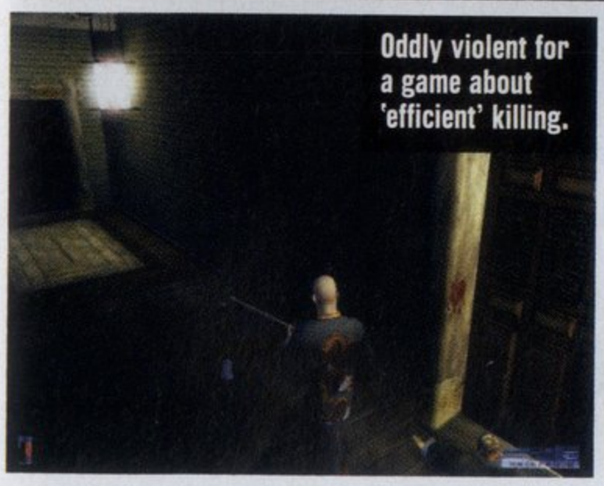
STONE COLD KILLER

Something the developers were keen to change was the often sunny, calm nature of the weather in *Hitman 2*. Certainly the Italian hit springs to mind, with its gorgeous mansion on a summer's day – we rather liked it – but here the weather, like everything else, mirrors 47's experiences. It's cold, vicious and unpleasant. With occasional showers.



That Jamie Oliver bloke – plus clothes

A man crouching in snow. Yesterday.



Oddly violent for a game about 'efficient' killing.

potential spade, though these make slightly more noise. Perhaps you would prefer to suffocate, impale or drown your victims instead? All these are now possible, although sadly not at the same time. Horrified? Intrigued? Relax. It's like mobile phones: soon we'll wonder how we coped without them.

You also have the ability to climb through windows or jump from balcony to balcony, though not in a platforming sense – in specific locations you're given the option. Io Interactive are clearly trying to fill the gigantic levels with more choice than before, and they're noticeably more populous in many ways: more civilians, more guards, more routes to the kill. Whether this will fundamentally change the game or simply refine what was already there, only time will tell. And next month's PC GAMES ADDICT. That will tell too.

Walked in these shoes before? Then certain levels will be very familiar. In a manner somewhat reminiscent of *Tomb Raider Chronicles*, *Hitman: Contracts* is told in a series of near-death flashbacks. The game begins with 47 bleeding heavily over the floor of a Paris hotel room – we've all been there, it's the carpets, they're grotesque – and getting bullets dug from his guts by a dodgy French doctor. Missions occur each time he slips into unconsciousness, though his memory is clearly somewhat confused. The restaurant hit on crime-boss Kong taken from the first game, for instance, is entirely recognisable but different in every meaningful way. It's either a clever reminder that reality is subjective and a single truth untenable, or to make it more fun. We just can't say.

Also promised is a smoother learning curve, along with a simpler menu system – despite the explosion in carnage and psychological viciousness, Eidos are hoping to build *Hitman* into their new greatest series. Well, it was that or *Herdy Gerdy*. There are even faint rumblings over Mr 47 becoming a one-game-a-year man which, if true, makes the coincidental *Tomb Raider* parallel ever so slightly worrying (*Oh, nice one* – Conspiracy Ed).

It's going to be interesting to see how a) *Contracts* moves the series on, and b) whether we can stop leaping from its lovely shadows and hitting people with spades long enough to find out. Psychologically it's heading to a place only survival horror has visited, but here you're not the good guy and you're not weak. You're merciless and armed to the teeth. It's a powerful combination. So will it really just be the victims going stiff? Sex and death, baby. They frame everything we live for.

TALKING IN CODE

Io's Rasmus Højengaard fills us in. Not literally.

PCGA: Will we find out more about 47's origins?
We always let out little bits and pieces about the story of 47 – of course we will do that here as well.

PCGA: The phrase 'strangulation animation' has been thrown around a bit...
Has it ? Well ... when it comes to close combat animations, there are a lot of new ones. In fact, the whole close combat action thing has evolved quite a bit.

PCGA: Which bits are you, as the developer, really excited about?
We're really pleased with a post filter we developed that adds all kinds of effects... This has a tremendous impact on the visual quality.

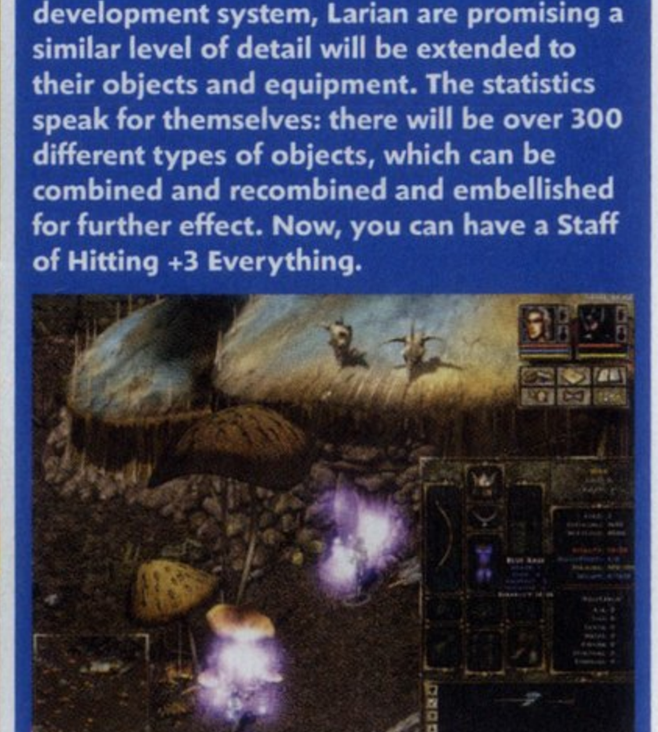
PCGA: Will there be any challenge to the player's sense of morality?
Yeah, the player will be rewarded if he or she only performs the necessary kills to complete the mission.

BEYOND DIVINITY

What's beyond Divinity? Breaktime, then double Maths.

By TIM EDWARDS

Ever think that a pentagram sounds like some kind of demonic greeting?



Even a gargoyle has a weak spot. His stony heart.

A ring of fire. Johnny Cash not pictured.

INVENTIVE INVENTORY

To complement the vast character development system, Larian are promising a similar level of detail will be extended to their objects and equipment. The statistics speak for themselves: there will be over 300 different types of objects, which can be combined and recombined and embellished for further effect. Now, you can have a Staff of Hitting +3 Everything.

BEYOND DIVINITY AT A GLANCE

Publisher:
Digital Jesters

Developer:
Larian

Genre:
Role-playing

Estimated Minimum System:
PIII 500, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card

Contact:
www.beyond-divinity.com

Release Date:
April-May

What's in it for you?
A magic-fuelled fantasy RPG just like mother used to make.

"I think that your magazine is very different to other PC mags, yes?" "Oh yes, definitely." "You see, your magazine did not like *Divine Divinity*, but everyone else, gave it many awards." A awkward pause.

Publishing strong opinions means that you must be able to defend them. The fact of the matter is, we didn't enjoy Larian's epic, old-fashioned role-player *Divine Divinity* half as much as some people apparently did. Nevertheless the sequel *Beyond Divinity* remains an *important* game, if only as an object of study. Larian understand their audience. Features we may scoff at are then eagerly lapped up by others. Doesn't mean they're right, mind...

Divine Divinity took a basic fantasy template and stretched it over 200 hours of hack and slash RPG action. It was an unashamed *Diablo* clone, right down to the red and blue vials measuring your health and mana. The other touchstone was *Baldur's Gate*, and Bioware's penchant for enormous platters of side-quest and incidental detail. *Divine Divinity* was a world within a game, coherent to the end.

Today, Larian are putting the finishing touches to the sequel, expanding both their fiction and their ideas, homing in on exactly what made *Divine Divinity* such an unexpected success.

"THE GAME IS ASKING YOU A SERIES OF QUESTIONS IN A PICK 'N' MIX OF ELEMENTAL DESIGN."

The storyline is suitably off-the-wall. After defeating the Black Ring and the Demon of Lies in the prequel, your character, the Divine One, is pulled into an alternative universe, where his soul is welded fast to that of a Death Knight. Luckily for you the eternal torment is a shared load, and breaking the curse will require that you co-operate. You see, good and evil *can* work together.

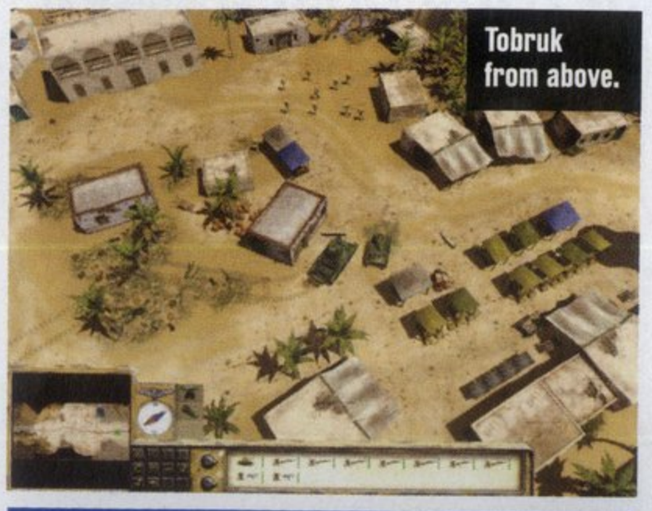
The big new idea is a skill system that does away with standard character classes. Rather than choosing a Barbarian or Mage adventurer, you're able to dip your wand into all the RPG staples. As you bash monsters and finish quests, you accumulate skill points that you're free to spend on new abilities. If you find that your harder-than-nails fighter is having trouble dealing with ranged attacks, you'll be able to craft entirely novel countermeasures. Spells and melee attacks are put together from a simple selection of drop-down menus. Essentially, the game is asking you a series of questions in a pick 'n' mix of elemental design. Would you like a) a fireball or b) a whirlwind? Would you like a) a single fireball or b) a cluster of homing fireballs? Would you like a cluster of homing fireballs that a) explode on impact or b) pass through the target, doing damage to those behind? And most importantly of all, would you like fries with that? With this simple system, you're able to create complex attacks, down to the finest details. The same method is applied to melee attacks, where you can add a final flourish to a series of rapid-fire bashings.

A global following is all but assured. Larian are nailing the very features that their core audience demands – the same, with more, and that little bit better. But will this innovation be enough to satisfy the discerning PCGA jury? We'll bring you the definitive review next issue.

DESERT RATS VS AFRIKA KORPS

Churchill called the Africa campaign the turning point of World War II. He should know.

By TIM EDWARDS


Tobruk from above.

Strength in numbers. And metal.

TOBRUK OR NOT TOBRUK

Mission structure is as varied as you expect. Most of the major battles of the African campaign are present, including the invasion of Tobruk, and the rabid fighting at Kidney Ridge, not to mention taking part in the Allied re-taking of Tobruk that eventually brought the African campaign to a close.

DESERT RATS AT A GLANCE

Publisher: Digital Jesters

Developer: Digital Reality

Genre: Strategy

Estimated Minimum System: P4 1.4GHz 128Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card

Contact: www.desertratsgame.com

Release Date: Late April

What's in it for you? Desert topping from the makers of the space RTS *Haegemonia*.

FOR videogame developers seeking inspiration within the confines of familiar settings, little historical details often act as convenient pegs from which to hang clever game mechanics. In *Call of Duty*, the final assault by Russian forces on the Reichstag created a stunning climax. In *IL-2: Forgotten Battles*, the Sturmovik's propensity for drifting to the left acted as a continual reminder of the age of the craft. *Desert Rats vs Afrika Korps* is informed by one fact in particular: **when Rommel ended his Africa campaign, 80% of his effective fighting force was scavenged from the British Army.**

Intrigued? You will be. Digital Reality's strategic recreation of the Africa campaign is told through the eyes of two senior officers, from either side of the Allied/Axis divide. You start the game playing as a German commander, before Monty mounts his counterattack, when control switches and you take on responsibility for the British advance. This way, you're always fighting for the winning side.

You're also always sure of an entertaining fight, thanks to Digital Reality taking certain functional liberties with the toys on offer. There are eight types of infantry soldier, ranging from heavy weapons and demolition experts to lightly equipped scouts. Success in any of the 20 scenarios depends on using their abilities in useful combinations, interlocking their abilities with the various vehicles available.

Like the thoroughly brilliant *Ground Control*, success is best achieved by using your units in combination, rather than rushing your forces straight into fire. You can creep your soldiers into observation positions, and then call down artillery fire on enemy outposts from afar, or, if your artillery has already been destroyed, you can sit that scout atop a tank's turret, and benefit from an increased visual range.

The resource management dogma that has been an RTS staple since *Dune 2* has been stripped out. Now, the economic war is fought off screen. Instead, you're handed out command points pre-mission, from which you can select troops from a central pool. Any troops that survive the fighting are freely available for the next mission. In Africa, the tank rush is outlawed.

"IT'S A SIMPLE MATTER TO KILL THE CREW OF A TANK AND TAKE IT INTO YOUR OWN RANKS."

Digital Reality are working incredibly hard to ensure that the various hardware and artillery pieces are modelled perfectly on their WWII counterparts. That extends right the way down to the speed that a gun rotates on its axis, and how a tank suffers under fire. You're even able to target individual tank components – meaning it's entirely possible, if not recommended, to disable rather than destroy. Which brings us back to the business of scavenging. Once you've disabled a tank, it's a simple matter to kill the crew and take it into your own ranks. One quick service, and it's back in business on your side. 80%? Frankly, Rommel wasn't trying. We expect our readers to top this when the *Desert Rats* invade Australian shores this April.

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WARHAMMER 40,000 DAWN OF WAR

Join us as we watch the sun rise over the future of warfare.

By Al Bickham

RELEASE DATE SEPTEMBER 2004

FORCE COMMANDER

The Space Marine Force Commander is a mighty warrior, armed with brutally powerful weapons. He also confers morale bonuses to any unit he joins.

ORK KILLER KAN

These lumbering Ork war machines may not represent state-of-the-art tech, but they can saw through ranks of infantry like honking great chainsaws through warm butter.

"DEATH OR GLORY!"

In his case, it's the former. Huge battles such as this are nothing short of spectacular, as each model has a number of animations for each situation... most notably, death.

Yes, believe your eyes. These are actual screenshots.

++INCOMING TRANSMISSION++

++COVERT VID-FEED // EYES ONLY++

++PCGABELFISH TRANSLATOR INITIATED++

++WORKING++

++WORKING++

++VID-TO-TEXT ENCODING COMPLETE++

We're looking down on a war-torn cityscape. The camera swoops to ground level, where we see rubble-strewn streets and, looming above us, once-great gothic structures: part cathedral, part factory, all flying buttresses and imposing porticos. Their once-grand facades are inscribed with the visual narrative of war: bullet holes, plasma burns, shattered brickwork.

We prowl along the road a little further, then launch skywards to view the tableau from above once more. A unit of blue-suited soldiers runs along into view on the road. As we peer closer, we can see U-shaped symbols on their shoulders and boltguns in their armour-clad hands.

The Space Marines, humanity's guardians, have arrived on this battered, war-torn world.

++ANALYSIS++

It should come as no surprise that Games Workshop (tabletop wargame makers and the creators of *Warhammer 40,000*) approached Relic Entertainment to create an RTS game based in the 40K universe. With a portfolio that includes the *Homeworld* games and *Impossible Creatures*, Relic are the natural choice for the job. Jay Wilson, *Dawn of War*'s Lead Designer, told us about their initial excitement at the prospect. "Most of us are regular Warhammer 40,000 players anyway, and when we heard that Games Workshop wanted us to do a 40K game, we were thrilled. We immediately sat down and worked out loads of ideas."

Now, you'd expect Games Workshop to guard their intellectual property jealously, and have a firm say in the direction of the game. As it transpires, Relic have been given the reins to develop *Dawn of War* as they see fit. "We took our ideas, many based on the tabletop game, to Games Workshop and presented them," explains Jay. "As we were describing what we wanted to do, they stopped us and told us about the origins of 40K. Basically, they said they'd created the tabletop game as a way to play in the universe they'd designed, using the races and technologies they'd dreamt up. So rather than working within the constraints and rules of the tabletop game, they said to us 'go create a game based in that universe, not directly

101ST AIRBORNE

As the battle rages, bodies are hurled through the air like rag-dolls. It all adds to the sense of carnage, and intimates a feeling of raw power in the deadly weapons at your disposal.

THE FINAL CUT

When opposing units get within spitting distance, they stow rifles and draw close-combat weapons. Charging into melee is therefore a great way to neutralise the threat of heavy-weapon toting infantry.

DREADNOUGHT

This fearsome Space Marine war engine is as deadly as it is impressive. Armed with a rapid-firing rotary autocannon and deadly power-fist, it can tear through infantry and vehicle armour with equal ease.

on the game'. This has given us a lot of creative freedom, and has allowed us to do some really interesting things."

One element that Relic knew they wanted to include in the game was the Space Marines. These genetically engineered soldiers are the elite human warriors of the future. That makes them pretty handy in a fight.

We zoom in for a close-up of the Marines. The game's scalability is immediately apparent – we can zoom right in on individual features, and the level of detail is startling, right down to scarring on armour plates and the intermittent twirling of ammo belts to keep weapon systems oiled and jam-free. These models wouldn't look out of place in a top-notch FPS.

Even at rest, the Space Marines aren't at rest. They scan the horizon for movement, sight down their rapid-firing bolt guns, then pause to check ammo and loading mechanisms. Leading the unit is a Space Marine Commander. Embellished with a swirling cloak and a vast, two-handed warhammer that crackles with static, he's a fearsome behemoth of a man.

Suddenly, there's movement at the end of the street. The Marines do a U-turn, only to find a squad of slavering space-Orks facing them down, gnashing their toothy maws, and brandishing pistols and axes in the air like so many green madmen. They need no incentive, and charge screaming towards the Marines, firing wildly as they come.

The Marines display great discipline and hold their ground. Bolters are raised, and a withering hail of bullets cuts the air. Several Orks tumble mid-stride, but the gap is soon closed. Ranged weapons are holstered in favour of axes and knives, and as the greenskins smash into the humans, the chatter of automatic weapons is replaced by the clang of blade against armour. But the real centrepoint of the battle is the Marine Commander... he strides forward, draws back his warhammer, and swings a blow that sends an Ork 20 feet through the air, limbs flailing.

THUNDER HAMMER

Bulky and slow to wield, the Thunder Hammer is nonetheless one of the most deadly weapons in the Space Marine armoury. A single swipe can bowl over several units at once, which makes for some spectacularly animated combat scenes. Its internal power generator also makes it a threat to vehicles, as it's capable of cracking armoured hulls like walnuts.

SYMBOLS OF OFFICE

Character units sport intricate heraldry, but it's not all for show. Such flamboyance often disguises rare, hi-tech equipment, such as forcefield generators and scanners.

++ANALYSIS++

After Relic showed us the *Dawn of War* demo level, we came to the realisation that no RTS game has ever managed to convey such a sense of character, or mad, swirling melee. The mere fact that units trade ranged weapons for the close combat variety when things get down and dirty is a first for RTS. It's an important distinction in tactical terms, too: if you want to neutralise a unit's ability to fire, you simply have to engage them in hand-to-hand combat.

Character units are a key feature of the tabletop game, as Captains, Commanders, Psykers and so forth can be attached to squads to bolster their combat effectiveness. This is reflected in *Dawn of War*, and the commander unit we've just seen in action is a perfect example. He provides a morale boost to the troops around him, and his sheer toughness and raw power in hand-to-hand combat gives spine to the troops he's attached to.

Morale is another facet of the tabletop game that Relic have interpreted in a way that makes sense in an RTS. "Broken units aren't much fun," explains Jay. "We wanted to get away from the complete black-or-white routs that result from low morale in the tabletop game. Instead, units that break in *Dawn of War* operate at reduced efficiency – their weapon accuracy and hand-to-hand abilities are worse." Although broken units are still in with a

The flamethrower: a timeless weapon of terror.

chance... if ordered to move away from the enemy, they'll do so at greater-than-normal speed, as fear fuels their flight.

As you might expect, lowering an enemy's morale is something you can exploit for your own ends. As the Space Marines are about to demonstrate...

The Marines move off down the street, leaving a red-splashed pile of green corpses behind them. A mound of rubble smothers the crossroads ahead, and as the Marines draw closer, movement appears... the area is swarming with Ork reinforcements. They're dug in; hunkered down to take advantage of the protection that the debris offers. As the Marines move into range and open fire, the mob unleashes a fusillade of rounds back in their plasteel-clad faces. Despite the Orks' lower proficiency with guns, the Marines find themselves fighting a losing battle, as their own weapons are far less effective against their dug-in opponents. After a couple of Marines fall, the squad pulls back out of weapons range to consider its options.

Time to bring in the big guns. With a couple of clicks on tactical display icons, four new troops arrive to bolster the squad. Two Marine scouts, lightly armoured but sporting elegant, long-barrelled sniper rifles, and two Marines toting heavy bolters – massive troop-chewing automatics.

The scouts take up positions outside the Orks' visual range, and open fire. As the rounds slam home, the bar representing the Orks' morale drops to nothing, representing the raw fear that unseen sniper-fire incites. The Marines move to exploit the confusion: legging it into weapons range once more, they open fire, the squad's rifle rounds bolstered by the braying chatter of heavy bolter fire.

The Orks' reduced morale appears to cancel out much of the bonus provided by their cover, and with the added punch of heavy weapons, the Marines begin to pick off more and more, eventually swinging the balance of the firefight in their favour.

But just as it looks as if the Marines have the greenskins licked, a swarming mass appears over the horizon... it's a huge Ork mob, rushing to support their embattled brethren. As the unit under fire is incorporated into the greater mass of its allies, its morale suddenly leaps in response. With a mighty roar they charge as one, pistols waving, axes swinging. Now vastly outnumbered, this is one fight the Marines surely cannot win.

++ANALYSIS++

Terror weapons can play a key part in your tactical approach. Among other things, sniper rifles, flamethrowers, monstrous creatures, and especially ordnance, will cause units to lose confidence. This makes certain unit combinations, such as Scouts working ahead of artillery vehicles, particularly useful in breaking the back of an enemy battle group.

But as we've seen with the Orks, each army has its own way of dealing with the consequences. Orks can 'mob up' to boost the morale of battered squads, whereas Space Marines simply regain confidence much quicker than any other army. It's still uncertain how the other two playable races in the game – Chaos and an as yet unrevealed faction – will deal with such situations.

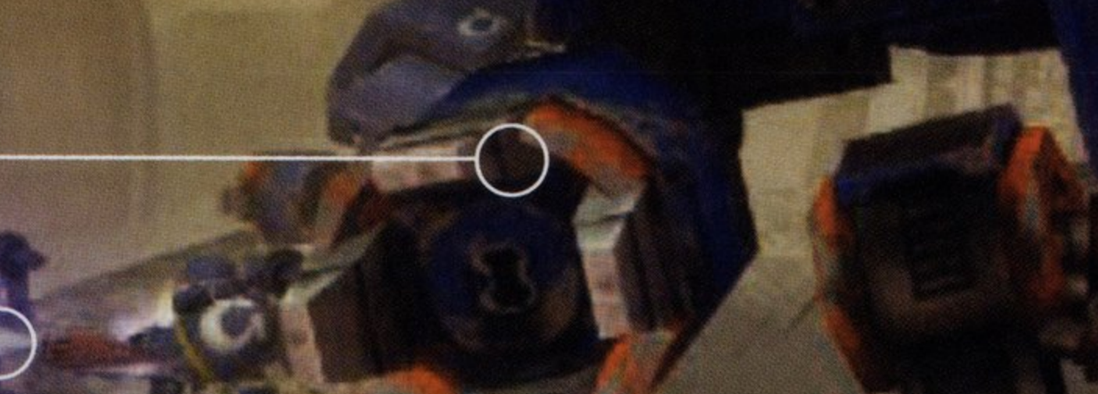
But it's not all about killing the enemy outright, which is what most RTS games are reduced to. It's about weakening enemy forces and pushing them back so that you can achieve your

FIST OF FURY

When a Dreadnought enters close combat, you can guarantee that the body count is about to soar. It has a range of different melee attacks, from broad swipes that knock whole numbers of units flying, to the rather more personal crush attack, where the Dreadnought picks up a single enemy and squeezes him dry.

OBJECTIVE SIGHTED!

These Marines are attempting to secure a battlefield objective – in this case, an ancient Imperial relic. Once captured, fleet command will provide you with elite units, such as Space Marine Terminators, to help keep hold of it.



De-juicing Orks is all in a day's work for the Dreadnought.

Hammering it Home

objectives. Relic are remaining cagey about what the four single-player campaigns will involve, but are keen to impress that multi-player games will be remarkably different to any other RTS.

"What we're aiming for is like a *Battlefield 1942* experience for RTS players," explains Jay. "We don't see why great ideas and great experiences shouldn't cross the genre boundaries." To help eliminate the rush mentality, the action is kept fluid with 'shifting' objectives, and until the later stages of a battle, the focus tends to rest on these rather than your opponent's base. And as Relic rightly believe, resources are the key to pacing. Not unlike *Total Annihilation*'s resource model, in which numerous resource patches offered drip-feed cashflow, *Dawn of War*'s maps have a series of strategic points. Once captured, these offer small resource boosts, and can be upgraded to house fog-of-war-busting radar outposts. They also mark your army's developing battle-line, as you begin to reinforce them with fresh troops. Capture enough strategic points to fulfil the victory conditions, and the game is yours. Makes a nice change from simply finding your enemy's base and blowing up all his buildings, doesn't it? To keep things interesting, larger maps also boast 'relic sites'. Capturing one of these marks a major strategic coup, and you'll be rewarded with access to super-elite units, as the unseen Generals deem your actions suitably important.

And what do you do with resources? You requisition units. But to requisition units, you need a base...

A huge marine drop-pod plummets through the clouds at terminal velocity. It's aimed squarely at a plate-metal landing pad on the ground. Brakes, it seems, are for girls.

KER-RANG!

100-odd tonnes of metal slams to the ground, stopping instantly. The landing pad slides back, and the pod is drawn underground. Seconds later, a squad of Marines trot out of the blockhouse door next to the pad. The reinforcements have arrived. And not before time... our view pans around and we see our original Marine squad, running for its life from the Ork horde, towards the Marine base we're now hovering above.

The base entrance looks intimidatingly well-guarded. At the back, two squat turrets are poised to fire. These are supported by several squads sporting missile launchers and heavy bolters. At the front line, we see assault troops armed with pistols, hand weapons and flamethrowers. And finally, guarding the entrance like giant steel sentinels, a pair of Marine Dreadnoughts, scanning the terrain ahead for incoming enemies.

Our heroic squad makes the entrance and passes between the safety of the big guns. Hot on their heels, the Orks continue the chase... then all hell breaks loose.

Like starting pistols, the turrets' thunderous reports signal the opening of a devastating barrage. Support Marines rock on their heels as missiles howl from their shoulder-mounted launchers. Thirty bolters bark and chatter, sending countless white-hot bullets into the thick of the mob. The assault Marines open up with their flamers, roasting the first wave

PACK MENTALITY

The Orks don't rely on hi-tech solutions, preferring instead to attack en-masse with large numbers of close-combat units. Even their vehicles, such as this Killer Kan, prefer to hunt in packs. In a group like this, they're more than a match for even the mighty Dreadnought.

EARTH-SHATTERING EFFECTS

Large explosions increase the sensation of chaotic combat, as they obscure your view for a second, and fill the air with clods of earth, shrapnel, and the bodies of the fallen.

Ork Rokkit Boyz lend their explosive assets to the base assault. Nasty.

of Orks. But the most awesome sight is that of the Dreadnoughts joining the fray.

These giant steel war machines, each containing the withered body of a veteran Space Marine warrior, lurch heavily into the conflict, rotary assault cannons hosing down the mob as they go. They lumber right into the thick of the action, swinging their steam-hammer arms, knocking half a dozen Orks into the air at a swipe. We focus in on one of the Dreadnoughts as it grasps a flailing Ork with its vicious power claw. It holds its prey aloft and crushes it repeatedly, puffing clouds of blood-mist into the air, before cricket-bowling the shattered body over the heads of its brethren.

++ANALYSIS++

This game is *insane*. Now here is exactly what you want from an RTS: an unbelievable tableau comprising hundreds of units that don't simply stand there and fire at each other like every other RTS in existence. These guys recoil, shake their fists, scream and die with utter conviction. They barrel through the air when hit by a large round; they bleed and shatter; they take vicious swipes and relish putting the boot in when they get close enough to their hated enemies. The Dreadnought alone has an array of different combat routines, so while you know what his attacks will do, he'll execute them in several unique ways. In short, *Dawn of War* not only takes the minutiae of combat to a level beyond that of any other RTS, it also threatens to bring Warhammer 40,000 to life like no Warhammer game we've ever seen before. *Final Liberation, Rites of War, Chaos Gate*... even *Fire Warrior* failed to move us like this, and as 40K games go, that one was much the best of the bunch.

Moreover, the level of creative freedom Relic enjoy means they can adapt the 40K mythos to make a game that reflects the universe the tabletop game is set in, but one that still works in a PC RTS environment. Wads of character, a fantastical level of carnage, tactical mechanics that encourage the player to innovate according to the situation rather than falling back on rote strategies... It all sounds like a rather potent combination.

"I'VE BROUGHT SOME FRIENDS"

Units that sustain significant losses will suffer morale modifiers, eventually leading to a rout. Fortunately, the Orks can restore their depleted morale by 'mobbing up' – literally, joining units together to make larger squads. It's a great reflection of their pack mentality.

The Orks know their strength lies in weight of numbers, and they throw everything they have at the Marine base. The Marines stand fast, relying on their massed firepower.

An Ork Killer Kan lumbers into the carnage. This walking dustbin is the Ork answer to the Dreadnought – lighter, clunkier, but still deadly. An Imperial tank, liberated by the Orks and festooned with their tribal symbols, begins lobbing huge, high-explosive shells at the Marine base.

Right in the thick of it stands the Marine Commander, swinging his warhammer in a berserker frenzy. Just as he raises his weapon for another blow, a Killer Kan waddles into view, its monstrous hydraulic pincers poised to strike.

Here, the battle will be decided.

++EXCITEMENT OVERLOAD++

++CRITICAL CASCADE FAILURE IMMINENT++

++BUFFER DUMP INITIATED++

++TRANSMISSION ENDS++

DAVID AND GOLIATH

Unlike in other RTS games, certain units are completely impervious to others. If this Ork attacks the Dreadnought, the best result he can hope for is to stymie its advance.

Assault marines soar down into the Orks' unengaged flank.

FROM TABLE TO DESKTOP

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War **takes its battlefield units from the tabletop game. The level of detail to which they've been reproduced is impressive...**

A Marine miniature, painted in the Ultramarines' livery.

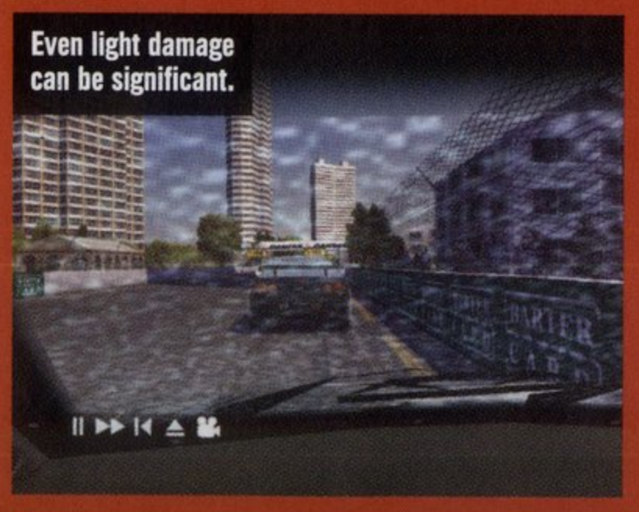
And here's his polygonal brother. The unit's animation really brings it to life.

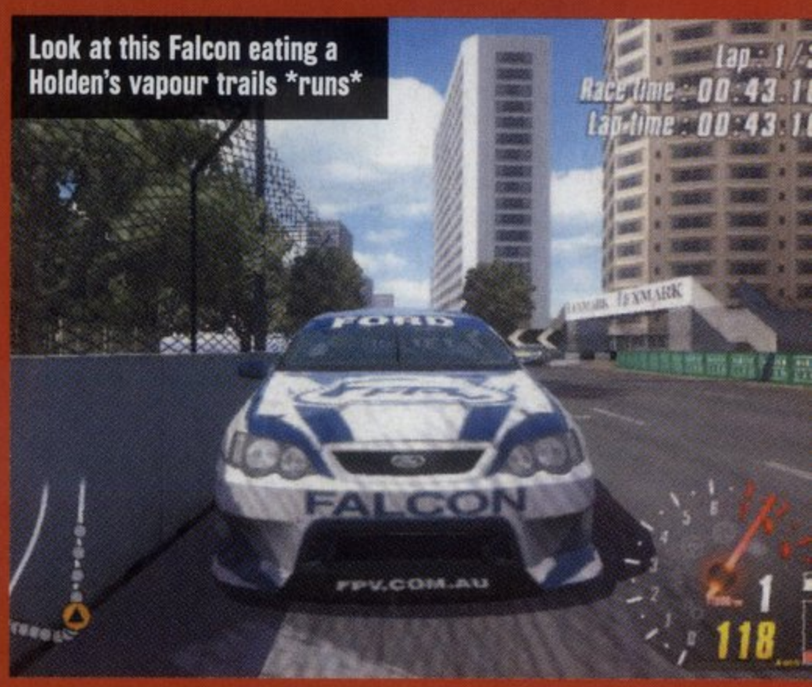
V8 SUPERCARS AUSTRALIA 2

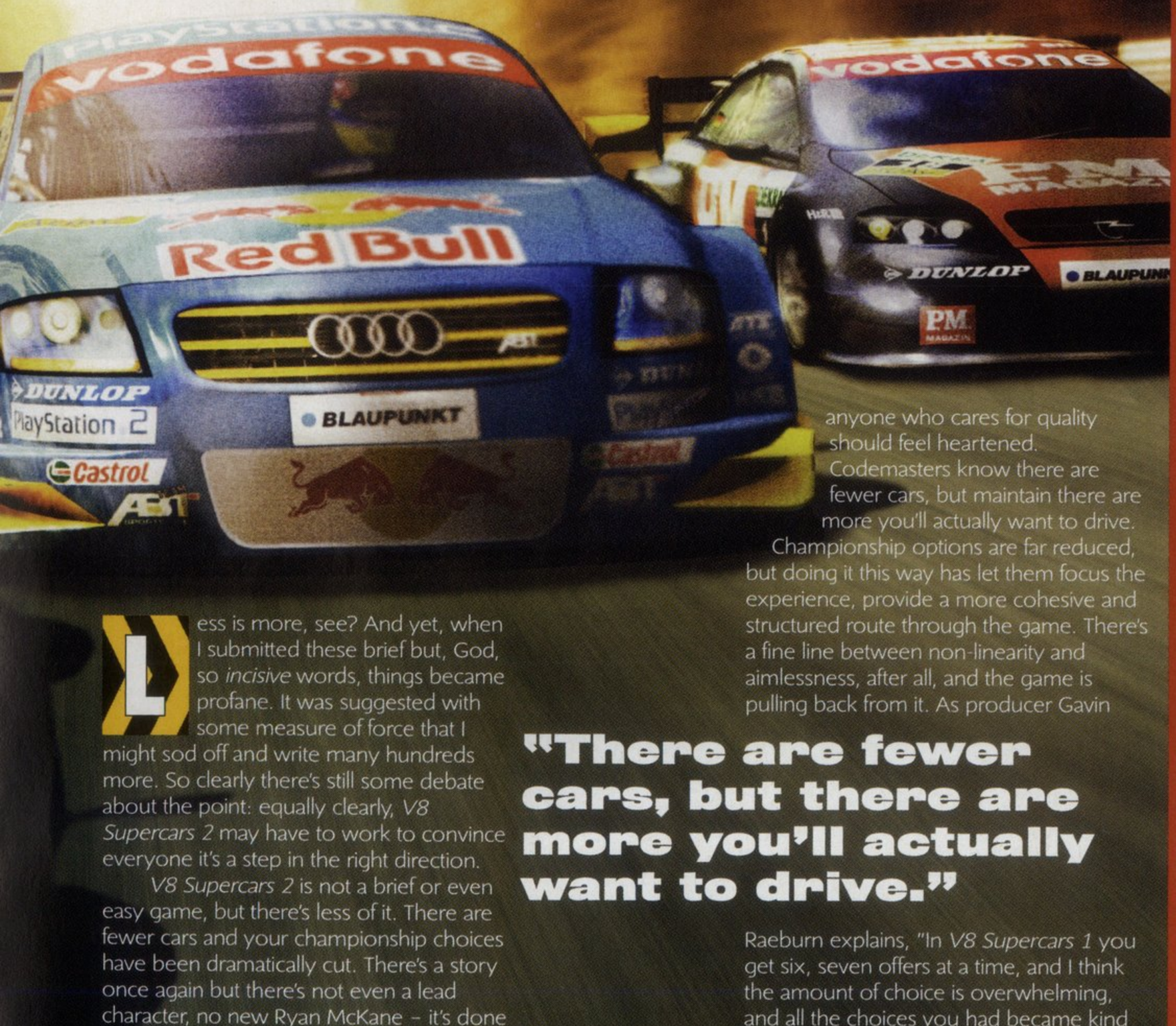
What a deceptive title this road racer bears - The Aussie V8 series is but one fifteenth of what this superb sim has to offer... **By Steven Williams**

RELEASE DATE MAY 2004

Look, it's The White Stripes! They're so cool.







L ess is more, see? And yet, when I submitted these brief but, God, so *incisive* words, things became profane. It was suggested with some measure of force that I might sod off and write many hundreds more. So clearly there's still some debate about the point: equally clearly, *V8 Supercars 2* may have to work to convince everyone it's a step in the right direction.

V8 Supercars 2 is not a brief or even easy game, but there's less of it. There are fewer cars and your championship choices have been dramatically cut. There's a story once again but there's not even a lead character, no new Ryan McKane – it's done in first-person, so the character is you. Those obsessed with quantity may even now be preparing to unleash terrifyingly misspelt rants on their favourite forums, but anyone who cares for quality should feel heartened.

Codemasters know there are fewer cars, but maintain there are more you'll actually want to drive. Championship options are far reduced, but doing it this way has let them focus the experience, provide a more cohesive and structured route through the game. There's a fine line between non-linearity and aimlessness, after all, and the game is pulling back from it. As producer Gavin Raeburn explains, "In *V8 Supercars 1* you get six, seven offers at a time, and I think the amount of choice is overwhelming, and all the choices you had became kind of meaningless. We just felt that narrowing that down is more true to the real world – you don't get that many offers. And it allows us to balance the difficulty far better."

"There are fewer cars, but there are more you'll actually want to drive."

And of course, now you get to be the star of the story and all the little people inside your screen talk, you know, directly to you. Which is like, cool! Yeah.

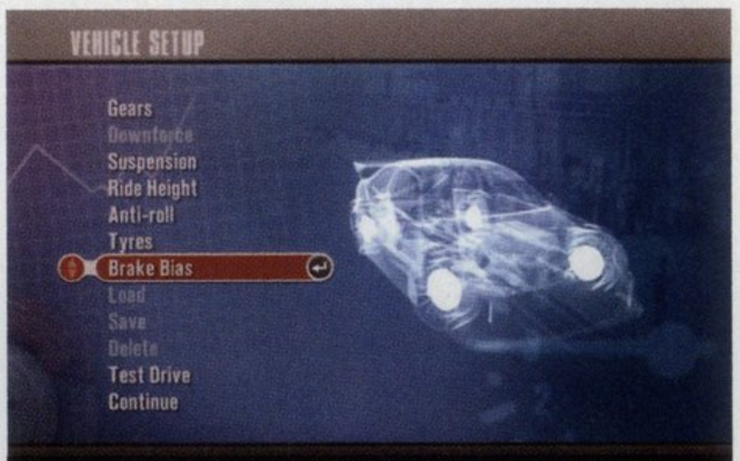
So if the first *V8 Supercars* was taking a sawn-off shotgun to the racing experience, the sequel is a sniper rifle with 15 whispering shells. Why 15? Because that's how many styles of racing you get, and we're not just talking about the minor differences between Touring Car championships in various territories either. You now get trucks, open wheel cars, classics, tuned road cars, rally and even ice racers, so to beat the game you must become a more 'complete' driver than before. The worry is that with so many different disciplines, the bright colours of each will simply run together to produce an unappealing brown mush. Simulating so many separate sports must lead to compromises, right? Yet having thrashed around with an almost finished version of the code, it appears each style is well-defined and throws up its own challenges.

None of the disciplines are unique to *V8 Supercars 2*, but there are intriguing inclusions nonetheless. Many will be drawn immediately to the Grand Prix cars, and it's true that getting a seat in one of these is the central aim of the game. They're certainly extremely fast and worthy of their place at the top, though don't expect Ferraris or McLarens or even the F1 tracks – it's very definitely not F1. Licensing, naturally. Some may find this disappointing, especially contrasted with the realism of the German and our own Australian Touring Car championships, but this is to miss the point. Very few remaining F1 tracks are interesting, and *V8SC*'s representation of the 'pinnacle' of motorsport is unbounded by this or

COREVALUES

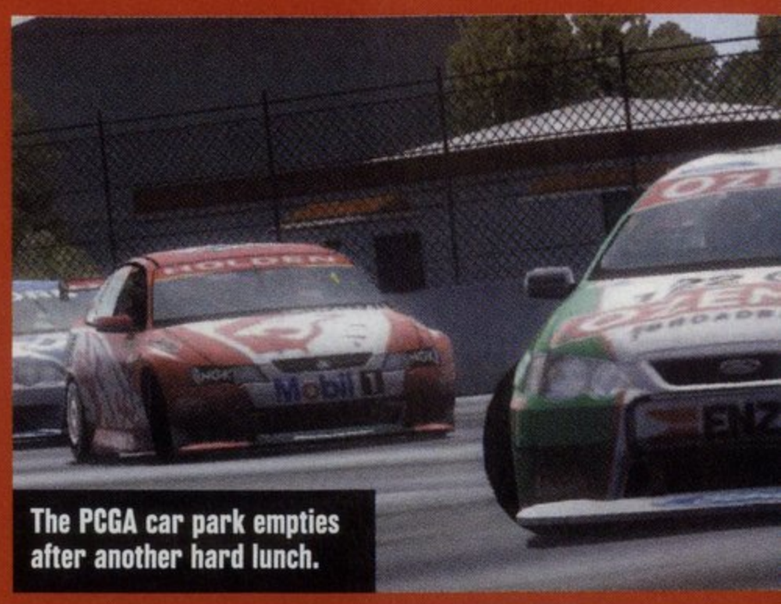
Now well-fettled under the hood, *V8 Supercars 2* wants you to thrash it. So welcome to a new, purposeful, no-nonsense style.

■ Once you're set up you go racing immediately. We mean it: straight into a scrap with little warning. It's to make a point: racing is king, nothing else. Career mode discards qualifying and even car set-up to concentrate on pack scrapping.

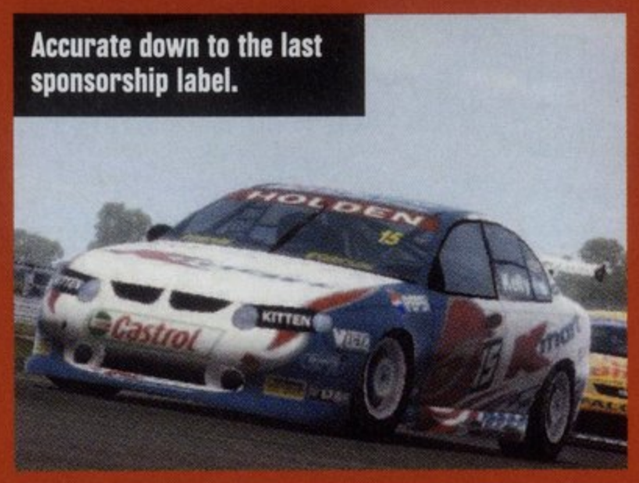


■ It isn't totally 'arcade', mind you – simulation mode retains qualifying rules and points realism, which should keep the masochists happy. Races can be scaled up to full length, and opposition ability is tunable up to 110 percent.

Not *Colin McRae*, but tangibly still *Supercars*. Which is good.



The PCGA car park empties after another hard lunch.



Accurate down to the last sponsorship label.

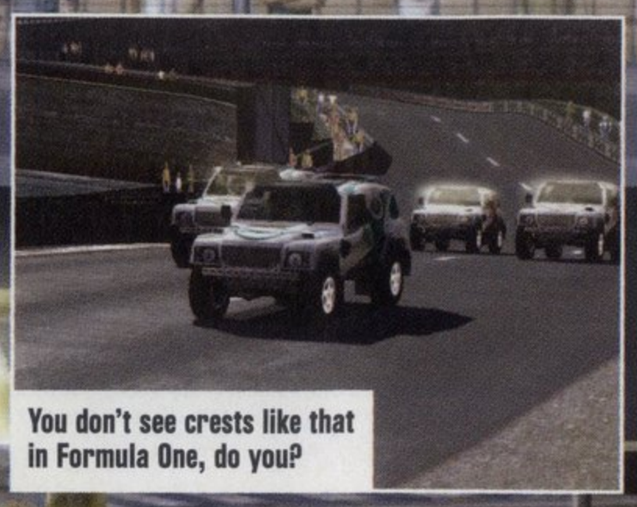
the rest of the choking rules Ecclestone et al enforce. Races are thus 21-car spankathons rather than carbonite-frozen funeral processions for the death of passion. If we were being critical though, even at this late stage in development these ultimate cars are rather unlovely to the eye.

In a strange irony, the Formula Ford cars are very promising. Spindly, whining and rather slow-looking in real life, these open-wheeled but crucially wingless cars are one of the highlights here. Racing is fast and close and control is knife-edged, and – as with the Grand Prix and oval-based Indy Racing League-style cars – wheels can interlock, causing spectacular accidents. And then there are the trucks. In real life they're insane, and it's pretty mad here too: steering is heavy and responses are glacial, while simple necessities such as being able to see are absent if there's anyone in front. Codemasters were still playing around with the braking when we saw the game, and certainly it's a critical area. Too good and mastering the tracks will be disappointingly easy, while if the brakes are too weak it's likely to end first in fury, then in caution. Neither is good. As Raeburn attests, "I don't like it when you start blaming the game for something, I like it when you blame yourself..." Good man.

To this end the physics have been thoroughly overhauled, with the intention of creating 'an accessible sim' poised deftly between arcade and simulation. Certainly our time hinted at no little success here. All vehicle types behave as you'd expect, and while an understanding of lines and braking points certainly helps, the cars have more or less forgiving natures. Lairy drifts and crazed festivals of opposite-lock are positively encouraged, and neatening it all out to get those few extra seconds of drive is only necessary on the very highest difficulty settings. Like Spinal Tap's amps, the difficulty goes to eleven (110 percent), although

Despite the presence of our Australian V8s and DTM, the focus is no longer on touring cars.

"James! Stop being so silly and come down from there!"



You don't see crests like that in Formula One, do you?

FILMED IN GLORIOUS CRUMPLEVISION(TM)

While much of the structure has been simplified, damage has become more complicated. But then, speed without peril is meaningless...

■ We've wanted it for ages: here it is. You can terminally damage your car. In one accident, if you're particularly vicious. Race over. Contact is still viable, however, especially side-on.

■ Lighter impacts affect gear selection and power output, and you'll notice the difference. In harder races it makes winning impossible, so you need to plan your passes carefully.

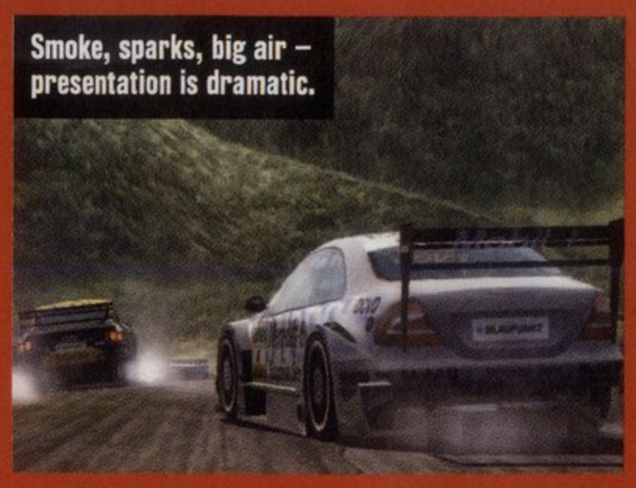
■ Debris remains where it's fallen. Hitting it causes little damage, but it's quite off-putting. Other drivers make mistakes and crash too, so it might not even be yours.

"I don't like it when you start blaming the game for something, I like it when you blame yourself."

more relevantly it's also adjusted automatically as you play. While there's a set curve for the whole game, if you're blowing everyone into the weeds it'll ramp up sooner, and if it's you in the weeds it'll drop down. The aim, as before, is to do away with the easy/medium/hard choice at the start of the game, which is the one place you're least qualified to judge it.

There's a promising online/LAN side too, with races for up to 12 cars and improved, less stuttery performance. Raeburn is notably enthusiastic about it: "This time around we've improved the algorithms and reduced the packet size we're throwing around to different PCs. We've also improved the prediction [of where cars will go, to allow for lag] so you get much smoother games." Algorithms, eh? You gotta love 'em. And you can host any series you've unlocked in single-player, though only join those you haven't – so you can go online for a sneak preview of those Grand Prix cars, for instance, but not on your terms.

Of course, cars are only half the story; tracks are the other. Serial *V8*-players will find almost all of them familiar, but again, quality is the real issue for those genuinely in search of racing thrills. Many have been overhauled using real topographical data and real racers' feedback, and it's noticeable – the heavenly Bathurst track, for instance, will surprise everyone by being even more challenging than before. However, don't expect total realism, as the circuits are clearly still 'tuned' to be fun rather than 100 percent copies, and what really enlivens each of the 34 tracks (56 when you include variations) is the continued use of severe crests, cambers and bumps. The bordering-on-dangerous speed of the later cars transforms the experience, and even the be-winged Grand Prix cars get significant air. Those same serial *V8*-players will also be happy to see the ultra bumpy Loch Ranoch track reanimated and updated from *V8SC*



Smoke, sparks, big air – presentation is dramatic.

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Once again there's a tale, but it's slightly more peripheral. It also looks and sounds considerably better. Written by Charlie Fletcher, who wrote Vinnie Jones' 2001 'comedy' Mean Machine, the brief cutscenes now play out in FMV – obviously it's far better looking than the last title's game-engine stuff. These scenes were directed by Harry Bradbury (This Life, The Bill, Cops) and are all first-person: the all-new characters talk straight at your unnamed, unseen character, though you never answer, you man of mystery you. Even the voice actors are less hammy this time. Thank Gawd.

2, while Florida, Chicago and Tokyo tracks round out the handful of fictional courses. Real circuits are too numerous to name, but add all the Australian and German touring car circuits (which include the A1-Ring, Adelaide, Bathurst and Nurburgring F1 tracks) to other International classics such as Donington, Oulton, Brands, Laguna and Road America and you've got the bulk of them. Obscure or fictional rally, rallycross (part-tarmac, part dirt) ice racing and oval courses – fortunately there are only two of these, Texas and Pikes Peak – complete the look.

So while *V8 Supercars* has undoubtedly been streamlined, it's mostly the least successful, least thrilling parts that have gone. How does Raeburn feel now time is almost up? "Every single area we wanted to improve we've managed to improve... The car physics I'm most proud of, I think it's spot on. The variety is obviously key as well. We have everything from Grand Prix cars down to Formula Fords, SuperTrucks, some nice Astons and the Koenig..." Ah, the Koenig. A Ferrari Testarossa in all but name. Some truly worthwhile cars.

But no TOCA Touring Cars. What? *V8 Supercars 2*, which is known as *TOCA* over in the UK has no TOCA cars? This might seem a trifle odd, but consider this: the cars of the British Touring Car Championship, which TOCA governs, are front-drive, two-litre objects of non-desire such as Astras. By comparison, our Aussie touring cars can barely cope with their snarling V8s and the Germans (who are accustomed to driving without speed limits on the autobahns) have 450bhp, rear-drive coupes. So despite obvious marketing pressure that would press Codemasters back in the motherland, *V8 Supercars 2* rather bravely choses to spare you from racing BTCC cars *because they're not as much fun*. Less is more, see?

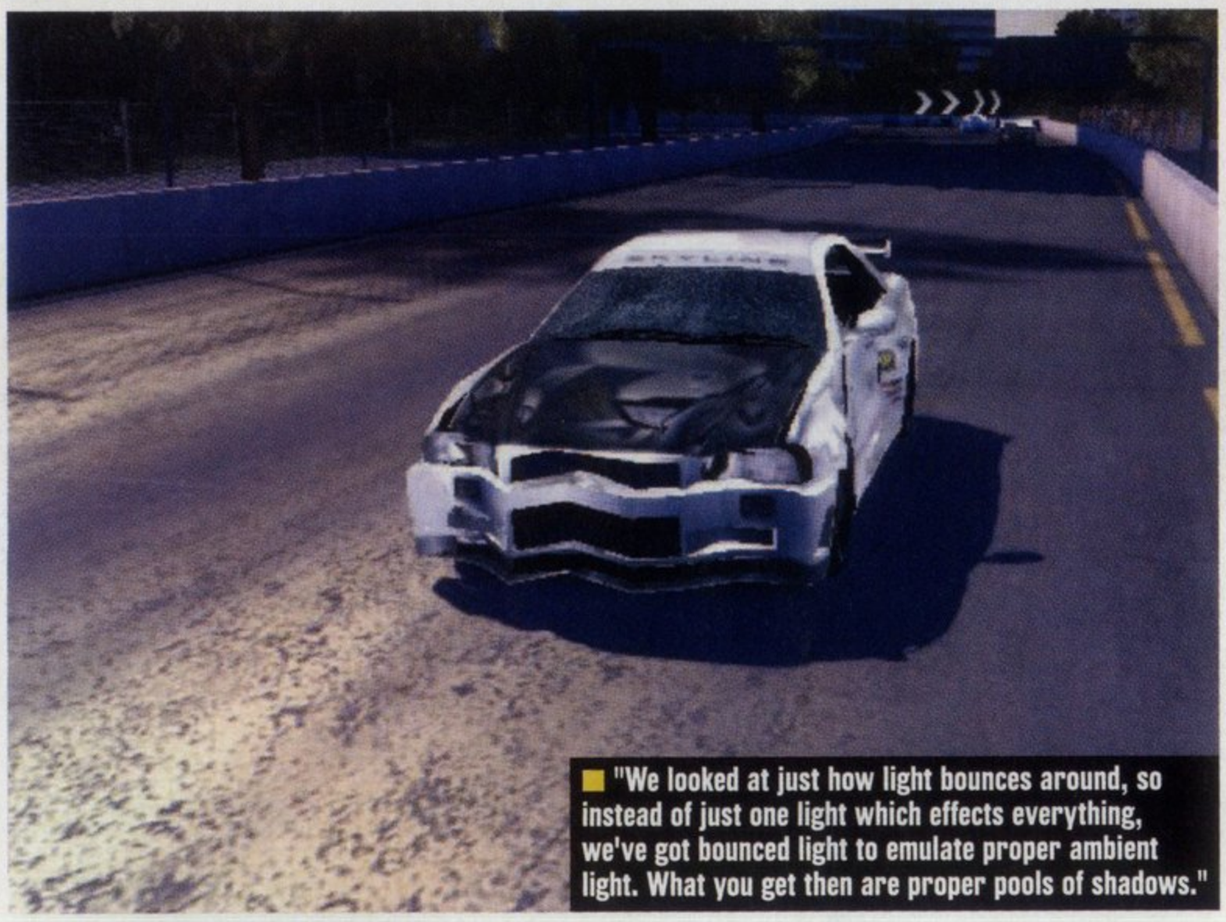
"It's mostly the least successful, least thrilling parts that have gone."

AUSTRALIA NO# 1?

Being a British developed game, you'd expect the TOCA series to be the big deal in this series right? Well actually, the team at Codemasters think that we've got the best touring car series in the world. While working on his tan in Nice last year, Dan Toose caught up with Gavin Raeburn as he was demonstrating an early version of the Xbox code. "Of all the cars in the game, your V8s are our favourites of the lot," remarked Raeburn. He then muttered something about our lack of a sense of mortality - apparently we're deemed to be somewhat foolhardy to be driving them.

MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

Apparently, sexy graphics are all about radiosity and, possibly, spherical harmonics. Mmm. Producer Gavin Raeburn talks photons.



■ "We looked at just how light bounces around, so instead of just one light which effects everything, we've got bounced light to emulate proper ambient light. What you get then are proper pools of shadows."

The very first championship – straight into the good stuff.

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ART FOR ART'S QUAKE

Videogames, always on the **cutting edge**, inspire the next generation of **modern art**.

By Jim Rossignol

ART can be found everywhere and in everything. We're drenched in it. But if you were to listen to the general banter of magazines, TV and newspapers, you'd think there was only one-way traffic between games and other media. Games based on this, games incorporating that, games of films, games with music by this pop star, or a script by that comic writer. In fact, the reverse is true, and videogames are becoming a major source of inspiration for the arty folk themselves.

And we don't just mean the *Anarchy Online* novels, or the comic of *Doom* (although that is high art, as anyone who goes to doomworld.com/10years/doomcomic/comic.php will discover). No, we mean that games are now a core inspiration for proper art and literature, as seen in 2002's Game On exhibition, or the humorous *Halo* short films 'Red vs Blue' showing in the Lincoln Centre in New York City. Readers of crime novelist Christopher Brookmyre will know that his time as a gamer inspired large parts of his novels, such as A Big Boy Did It And Ran Away. Pixel art is in vogue everywhere. Yes, the influence of gaming is enormous. In fact, asking whether games are art is as irrelevant as it is sniffy and boring.

HIGH RES ART

While the Rotterdam Film Festival showed some games-related exhibits at the end of January, it's in the Americas that the real inspiration has struck. In the past year there have been two highly significant exhibitions which have taken game-skewed art to a new level. The first of these was the Killer Instinct exhibition in New York City. It's no mistake that this exhibition shared its name with the 1995 Nintendo fight-'em-up title. In fact, one of the main artists who exhibited at the event, Cory Archangel, actually uses hacked Nintendo consoles to create much of his art. One of these is a digital 'painting', created by taking a *Super Mario Bros* cartridge and rejigging it to display only the parallax cloudscapes that make up the background of the game. Another work of his was 'Warhol Hunt', the classic lightgun game *Duck Hunt* re-engineered for gamers to hunt the pop-art head of Andy Warhol.

We asked Mr Archangel whether games are to be regarded as being just as important as other, more recognised forms of art, such as film, sculpture and painting. "I would put games on an equal level to all those forms of entertainment in every way," he told us. "This of course includes the ability to be subversive." He went on to tell us how people had reacted to his artwork: "The best response has come from the video art community because they see a video game system as basically a

video synthesizer, and I would argue that videogame art is a natural extension of video art. I also take great pains to make sure that people do not need a videogame background in order to enjoy my work. Still, people who grew up playing Nintendo games are always the ones who react best to my work. I always get stories that start with 'I used to have a Nintendo...'"

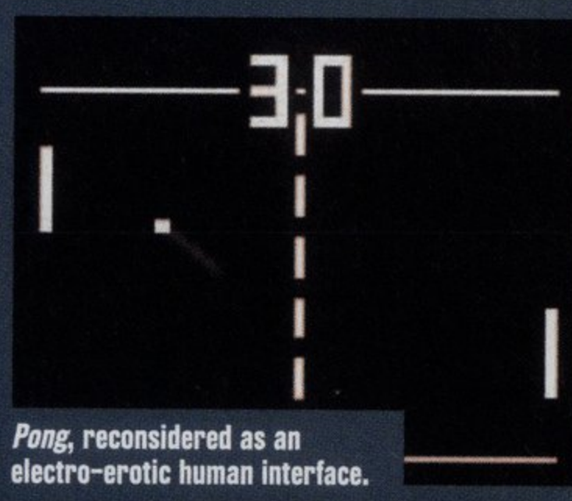
But it wasn't all obsolete Japanese cleverness at Killer Instinct. The grand vizier of online gaming was there too, albeit it in a peculiar form. Velvet Strike was the attempt by culture commentator and activist Anne-Marie Schleiner to turn *Counter-Strike* into a protest against war and the particularly nasty things going on in the current political climate. It encouraged players to instigate in-game protests, such as spraying anti-war wall murals. You can read a rather good essay about what they hoped to achieve at their website at www.opensorcery.net/velvet-strike as well as download the best of their logos.

We asked Ms Schleiner whether she was surprised by the wealth of negative responses from the *CS* community, many of which have been published on the website. "At first we were very surprised," she told us. "I didn't realise that we had hit a nerve in the American gaming community. It was disappointing in the beginning that spammers disabled our chat forum where some interesting critical discussion was going on. But in the end the hate mails were my favourite part of the project and I really enjoy the 'flamer gallery' where we sample some of the best. When I'm feeling down, re-reading them always cheers me up. And I did communicate on an individual level with some of the flamers... one decided in the end he agreed with me and another who was the most polite opposition I encountered to the project, a US Marine."

We rounded off our chat with Ms Schleiner by asking if she thought the trend towards so-called 'realism' might be less pronounced if games were less male-dominated. "I don't know, but my intuition is yes. In Japan both men and women and people of all ages play games and there is much more diversity in the kinds of computer games being developed, most of which never reach the west." Food for thought. Is the march into greater realism making western games sterile?

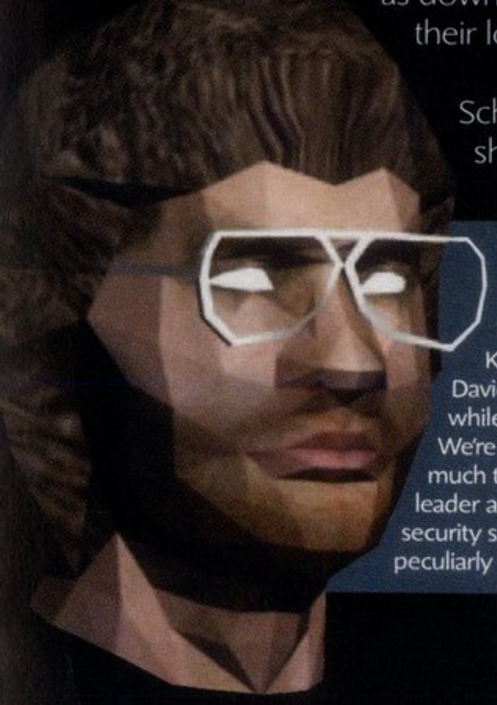
PLAY FOR PAIN

Another bizarre interactive artwork from the Bang the Machine exhibition is 'The Painstation' by art collective Fur, a conversion of the popular console toy into a game of *Pong* that delivers bracing electric shocks to the loser. Could this be the future for games? If so, we're already living in it. We're sure there's a specialist club for this sort of thing...



***Pong*, reconsidered as an electro-erotic human interface.**

"I didn't realise that we had hit a nerve in the American gaming community..."



TEXAN TROUBLES

That's right, it's a polygonal David Koresh model. Not only that, it's a David Koresh mask, which you wear while playing *Waco Resurrection*. We're not sure whether it really adds much to the feel of being a troubled cult leader about to be mauled by the US security services, but it certainly adds a peculiarly sinister touch to the gaming.

Koresh mask on table, and the players in action. The game itself is packed with weird Biblical quotes.

GETTING FRISCO

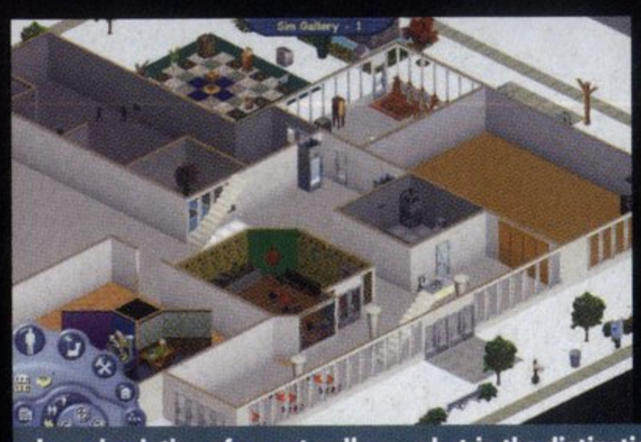
A yet more significant event in the 'art as games' world is the Bang the Machine exhibition currently being held at the Yerba Buena arts centre in San Francisco. In this major art show, gallery space is dominated by videogame artforms. For the retro-heads there is *Carpet Invaders*, a floor projection of *Space Invaders*, but apparently made to resemble Afghan rug designs. Then there's a five-foot high sculpture of Mr id, John Carmack. Sounds dreadful, but there's a twist: it's called '600-polygon John Carmack' and is actually a sculpture of his *Quake III* avatar. (*Now there's a bit of class* – Ed.) Even more fascinating is the recreation within *The Sims Online* of the gallery where the event is being staged, by artists Katherine Isbister and Rainey Straus. Visitors to the event will be able to sit in the gallery, while their Sims explore the gallery in-game. There's some kind of existentialist conundrum going on here, if we could only put our finger on it. Find out more over at: www.simgallery.net

This exhibition too brooks controversy, demonstrating that gamers are quite capable of rivalling Damien Hirst and the rest of the Shock Art elite in their attempts to subvert, surprise and otherwise make some kind of statement. Bang the Machine is playing host to *Waco Resurrection*, a multi-player game in which players can take the role of doomed Branch Davidian cult leader David Koresh in the hours before the siege that ended his life. The website explains it thusly: 'Revisiting the 1993 Waco, Texas episode, gamers enter the mind and form of a resurrected David Koresh through custom headgear: a voice-activated, hard-plastic 3D skin. Each player enters the network as a Koresh and must defend the Branch Davidian compound against internal intrigue, sceptical civilians, rival Koreshes and the inexorable advance of government agents." As you can see from the photographs, players get to wear a polygonal David Koresh helmet as they sit and play the LAN-based game. One peripheral that's unlikely to turn up in Money Pit any time soon.

> "Each player enters as a Koresh and must defend the Branch Davidian compound..."

Naturally we sought out *Waco Resurrection*'s developers C-Level to ask how people had reacted to their project. "So far, gamers have responded very positively," replied a spokesperson. "We think that games have the capacity to take on historical content without trivialising them for the sake of gameplay. We see that the gaming community is ready for gaming to become a more serious and even critical form of expression. As games become an increasingly widespread form of entertainment with a more diversified audience, it's natural that the medium should start representing a wider range of human experiences. In this way, the evolution of games as a cultural medium will follow the same path as any medium – be it photography, film or television." Lofty ideals indeed. However weird the C-Level project might seem, this kind of innovation is going to bounce back into games development at large, so that we'll see more new and weird games in the future.

We asked C- Level whether they thought that the mass-market nature of



In a simulation of an art gallery, what is the distinction between art and simulated art?

PLAYING EUROPE

While the US seems to be teeming with artists who work in the medium of videogame, we're no less pretentious in Europe. The Rotterdam Film Festival's Exploding Cinema exhibition is showing short films inspired by games, as well as Afghan rugs depicting guns and bombs, a video installation showing the house of Osama Bin Laden and the gamepods from David Cronenberg's virtual reality epic ExistenZ. You can find out more at: www.filmfestival rotterdam.com

videogames meant that they were ripe for the kind of subversion modern art seems to thrive on. Their response was measured. "*Waco Resurrection* may depict an historical event about a radical subculture, but the idea of a medium presenting a subjective interpretation of a complex historical event is not in itself subversive – except in the current context of gaming. A standard convention of film documentaries, for example, is to present conflicting subjectivities while framing information in a seemingly objective manner. In doing so, the film both makes an argument and allows the viewers to form their own impression in relation to that argument. *Waco* is often perceived as a subversive game only because games so rarely stray from the same themes and topics we see again and again. It is subversive in that it offers an alternative to the predominant content choices: war, fantasy, sports... It's time for games to make proportional leaps in content to the ones made in technological innovation."

C-Level have also designed 'Tekken Torture Tournament', an interface that converts damage in the game to real electric shocks for the player. Conclusion: stay away from artists, they're all a bit scary. In all seriousness though, it is heartening to see the influence of games spreading into other media, such as these elite conceptualist gallery events, and into the radical games that such projects spawn, of which the *Waco Resurrection* game is an acute example. It perhaps shows that however silly the discussion about the relationship between games and art might become, they do have one thing in common: the capacity to make us think.

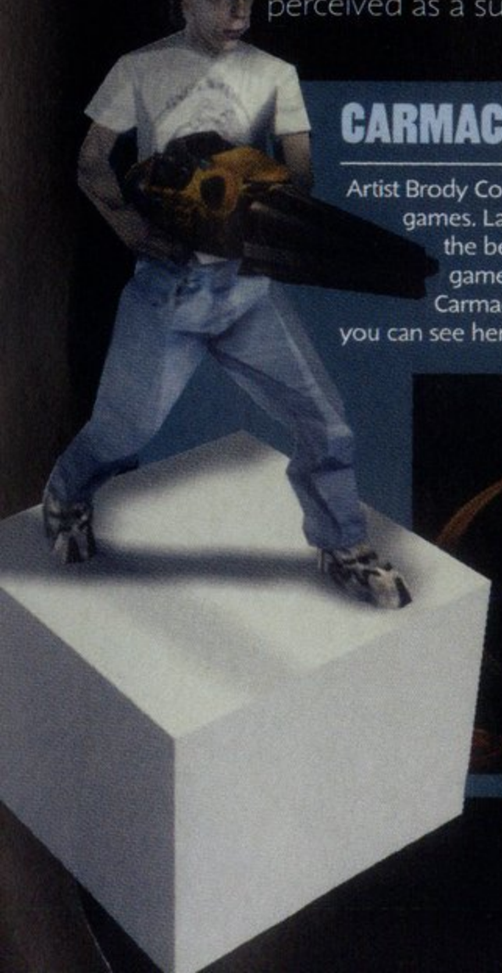
Isometric paintings in the gallery.

I AM THE LAW!

Newshounds will remember that in 2002 a US judge ruled that games were not a valid mode of expression and were therefore not protected under America's tough freedom of speech laws. What went unnoticed, however was that the law was repealed in 2003. As far as US law goes, games are an arena in which people can express their views.

CARMACK GETS PLASTERED

Artist Brody Condon has been busy in the world of art and games. Last year he put together a competition for the best fake screenshot (the real world made game) and this year he's been turning the Carmack *Quake III* avatar into a large sculpture, as you can see here. Lovely, isn't it?



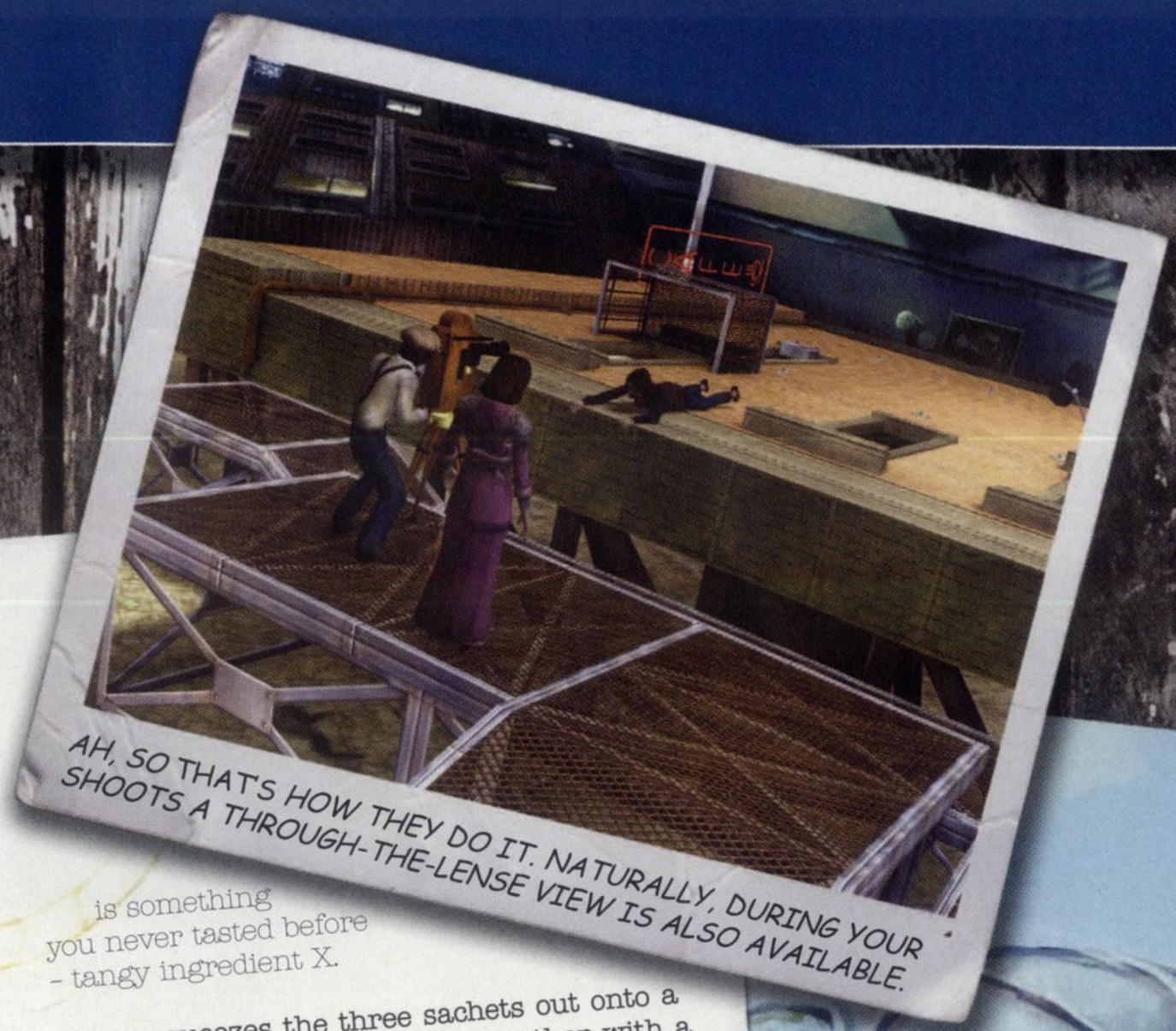
First we get the plaster model, then it's painted up, with all the vertices marked out for your pleasure.

SO YOU WANT TO BE IN...

THE MOVIES

RELEASE DATE CHRISTMAS 2004

A screenplay by Tim Stone



EXT. A31, THE HOG'S BACK, NEAR GUILDFORD, SURREY - DAY

A black scorpion crawls towards us across the tarmac. The sound of an approaching car. A tyre mashes the scorpion into the road surface, the CAMERA rising from the stain to reveal a lonely transport cafe.

INT. TRANSPORT CAFE - DAY

While the place isn't jammed, there's a healthy number of people drinking tea, munching on bacon and eggs. Two of these people are BUTTLE, a games hack, and KANE, a designer at Lionhead Studios. Buttle is dressed in combats and a University of Arizona sweatshirt. He has a notebook open in front of him. Kane is dressed in a black suit. He's smoking cigarettes like they're going out of style.

KANE
Did you bring it?

Buttle slides a briefcase across the table to Kane who flips it open. His face is bathed in golden light.

KANE (*closing the case*)
So what do you want to know?

BUTTLE
Tell me about *The Movies*. Pretend I'm an idiot.

KANE (*taking condiment sachets from a little pot on the table*)
This ketchup is *Theme Hospital*, *Theme Park*, in fact any decent *Tycoon*-type game. This mustard is *The Sims*. This tartare sauce is something you never tasted before - tangy ingredient X.

Kane squeezes the three sachets out onto a saucer and swirls the dollops together with a plastic spoon.

What you have right there is *The Movies*. A simulation game. A game where *you* build and run a Hollywood movie studio (the ketchup), nurture stars (the mustard), and direct your own motion pictures (the tangy tartare sauce) through a hundred years of reality-rooted cinematic history. Your objective: generate greenbacks, grow your lot, win statuettes, make Paramount look like a molehill, outfox Twentieth Century, take the Universal globe and kick it up and down Sunset like a football.

As Kane pauses to sip his tea, a big naked dude enters the cafe, looks around purposefully, then strides towards Buttle.

NAKED DUDE (to Buttle)
I need your clothes, your boots, and your 1993 Holden SS Commodore.

FADE TO BLACK

TITLE CARD
"Mr. Buttle is reluctant to surrender his property."

FADE UP: *The interior of the transport cafe a few moments later. Buttle, showing signs of a vicious beating, is sitting in his underwear. The naked dude is not present.*

"TELL ME ABOUT *THE MOVIES*. PRETEND I'M AN IDIOT."

"OK ROBBIE, AND THE LINE IS: 'YOU MANIACS. YOU BLEW IT UP. BUZZ WHIRR CLICK. DAMN YOU. GOD DAMN YOU ALL TO HELL. BEEPTY-BEEP.'"

BUTTLE
Tell me more about the tartare sauce.

KANE
The beauty of the filmmaking process in *The Movies* is it can be a quick or as complex as you want it to be. For the mogul who'd rather be tending talent, developing their lot, or working more intensely on another, bigger budget production, getting a new flick underway can take three shakes of a lamb's tale. Choose the title, stars, and sets, select the scenes and you're done. The ball is rolling.

While this kind of hands-off approach is perfectly valid, if pursued exclusively it does mean you're missing out on some of the most original and fascinating facets of the game. Facets like fiddling with sets, costumes, and props, tweaking the direction sliders, adding subtitles, sound effects and music.

BUTTLE
Direction sliders?

KANE
Each picture is composed of a sequence of canned scenes selected by the player. There are thousands of these scenes to choose from and each one has its own slider (sometimes more than one) allowing you to influence the way it plays out. Examples. A bullying scene in a school corridor. The slider here controls the levels of violence employed by the bullies. Nudge it to the left and they're content to push their victim around some. Whack it all the way to the right and they'll force his noggin into a locker and repeatedly slam the door. Another example. A seduction scene. Two lovebirds on either end of a couch. We have a passion slider this time. Turn it down you've got Pride and Prejudice, turn it up you've got 9 1/2 Weeks.

Kane's is interrupted by noise from a neighbouring table. A couple are sitting there, the man embarrassed, the woman apparently in the midst of an amazing orgasm. The orgasm eventually subsides.

KANE
Now where was I? Sliders. Messing about with these is the gaming equivalent of busting onto the set and grabbing the director's megaphone. Through them you might get the chance to tell your cast how scared they are, how drunk they are, or even where they've been shot. Fun certainly, but meaningful too, as changes can have a major impact at the box office. Put out a product that is too tame, too violent, too sexually explicit or too unpatriotic for the tastes of the time and the receipts will reflect it.

Props are another way of sculpting a scene to fit your vision. Place a revolver into a situation, and the characters will react to it, transforming the dynamic. Because all on-screen objects fall, collide, bounce etcetera according to believable real-world physics, you've also got wonderful opportunities for personalising your creations with unique slapstick routines and cunning stunts.

At this point Buttle drops his biro. Before he can pick it up it's sent skittering across the floor by the foot of a passing waitress. Buttle pursues it on hands and knees, passing a dead monkey clutching a date, a tin of Dapper Dan hair pomade, and then a buckled Florida licence plate, before finally finding it beneath a table. Under the table he is surrounded by the legs of four people. One pair is particularly hirsute.

VOICE 1 (*from above*)
I'm captain of the Millennium Falcon. Chewie

THE TECHNICOLOR OF MONEY

A silent jazz singer and a grey yellow-brick road won't get you very far in *The Movies*. Even if your actors stink, and your auteurs make Ed Wood look like Stevie Spielberg, if you've managed to stay at the head of the crucial technological stampede, a blockbuster may not be out of the question. ■

1920
Dismissing talkies as a fad is a recipe for ruin in the Roaring Twenties.

1950
Reach the '60s without developing colour and your audiences may start to thin.

1970
Pivotal techs for the '70s include motion-controlled cameras and the afro comb.

HITCHCOCK ORIGINALLY WROTE 'VERTIGO' AS A HOMOSEXUAL ROMANCE FOR BALD MEN. NARROW-MINDED STUDIO CHIEFS DEMANDED CHANGES.

THE EVER-VERSATILE BONEYARD SET. GREAT FOR HORROR, GANGSTER OR WESTERN SCENES. LESS SUITABLE FOR ROMANTIC COMEDY.

here says you're looking for passage to the Alderaan system?

VOICE 2 (*from above*)
Alderaan? No, it's Oberon we're after. Oberon Street, near the big KMart. Do you know it?

CUT TO *Buttle back in his seat.*

BUTTLE
Sorry about that. You mentioned subtitles earlier.

KANE
Because the actors and actresses in *The Movies* don't automatically deliver audible lines you may want to manually add dialogue or voiceovers later via text subtitles or self-created sound files. While not necessary for success within the game, this kind of extra-curricular attention to detail will definitely improve your film's reception when you distribute it among friends (all movies are saved in mpeg form) or enter it in the weekly competition on the official website. Entering text dialogue or narration is dead simple. Recording and inserting audio is naturally a bit more involved, but there's considerable incentive in the fact that polygonal thespians will actually lip-sync to your files.

BUTTLE
Cool. What's this about a competition?

KANE
Every week, visitors to the website vote for their favourite submitted flicks. The winners get online money they can fritter away on new downloadable game content. Props, costumes, sets... Lionhead are going to be constantly crafting new stuff.

"THE GAMING EQUIVALENT OF GRABBING THE DIRECTOR'S MEGAPHONE."

Kane drains the last dregs of his tea, revealing as he does the words KOBAYASHI PORCELAIN printed on the bottom of the mug. He calls to the waitress.

KANE
Garcon! Tea!

BUTTLE (*gesturing towards his notebook*)
This is good material. Let's move on to the mustard now – the Cagneys, the Kidmans, the Crowes.

The waitress arrives, and plonks a mug of steaming char in front of Kane.

WAITRESS (*snotty*)
'Garcon' means boy.

She splits.

KANE
Unless you've lived in a cave all your life there's probably not a whole lot I need to tell you about the stars in *The Movies*. Colossal egos, quick tempers, destructive

TO PROTECT AGAINST INJUN ATTACK, ALWAYS ARRANGE YOUR HONEYWAGONS IN A CIRCLE. ALSO EFFECTIVE AGAINST PAPARAZZI.

Reel Time Strategy
View Set Information
Rooftop Set
HIRE AN UNCONVINCING ACTOR FOR A DRAMATIC SCENE LIKE THIS, AND YOUR SHAREHOLDERS WILL SOON BE JUMPING OUT OF REAL SKYSCRAPERS.
Hire Director
Cindy Pedalo (33) Director
Snacking between meals
THERE'S A SANDBOX MODE. USE IT FOR FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION PICS, MUMMY MOVIES, AND BUDGET-FREE EXPERIMENTATION. JUST DON'T GET SAND IN THE CAMERA.

addictions, breakdowns... all the unsavoury stuff you've read about in mags like Heat and Hush-Hush, it's all there in the game, and it's important too.

Allocating Tom Cruz a smaller trailer than a co-star might seem insignificant but his resulting hissy-fit could disrupt your shooting schedule and cost you a packet. Passing over Julienne Roberts for the leading role in courtroom rom-com Trial Separation might just be the last straw that sends her into the arms of a rival studio.

Naturally, no-name actors aren't going to cause quite so many headaches but then again they aren't going to exert the same leverage at the box-office either. All artistes have skill ratings relating to the eight genres in the game and these can be improved over time through relevant experience.

BUTTLE
I imagine directors are represented in a similar way.

KANE
You imagine correctly. As with a quality star, the right director can transform a picture. Not enough mazuma for a sensational script, sumptuous score, or spectacular set? Don't fret. If you've taken the time to nurture your own in-house Hitchcock there's hope.

A portly man in a suit brushes past the table. His head is out of shot.

Talent in *The Movies* isn't just a number, it's right there on the screen in front of you. A cut-price cast *will* act atrociously, making your Macbeth-inspired mobster flick look like an episode of Garth Marenghi's Darkplace. A duff director *will* show his ineptitude in-game, dragging-out shoots with endless takes.

BUTTLE
So a capable cast plus a decent director equals a smash movie?

KANE
Not always. There's a bundle of other factors to take into consideration. How coherent is the finished picture? While it's fine to blend genres a little, overdo the fusions and critics and audiences will leave theatres confused and complaining. The same goes for props. Have your Beau Geste stumbling upon a telephone in the middle of the Sahara and eyebrows may be raised.

Earlier I mentioned the awareness of taste thresholds. Well it's also important to follow current affairs and monitor the output of the competition. If your cowboy caper, A Man Called Gentle, is the 17th western released that year, don't be surprised if it bombs.

BUTTLE
How are moguls meant to keep abreast of current affairs?

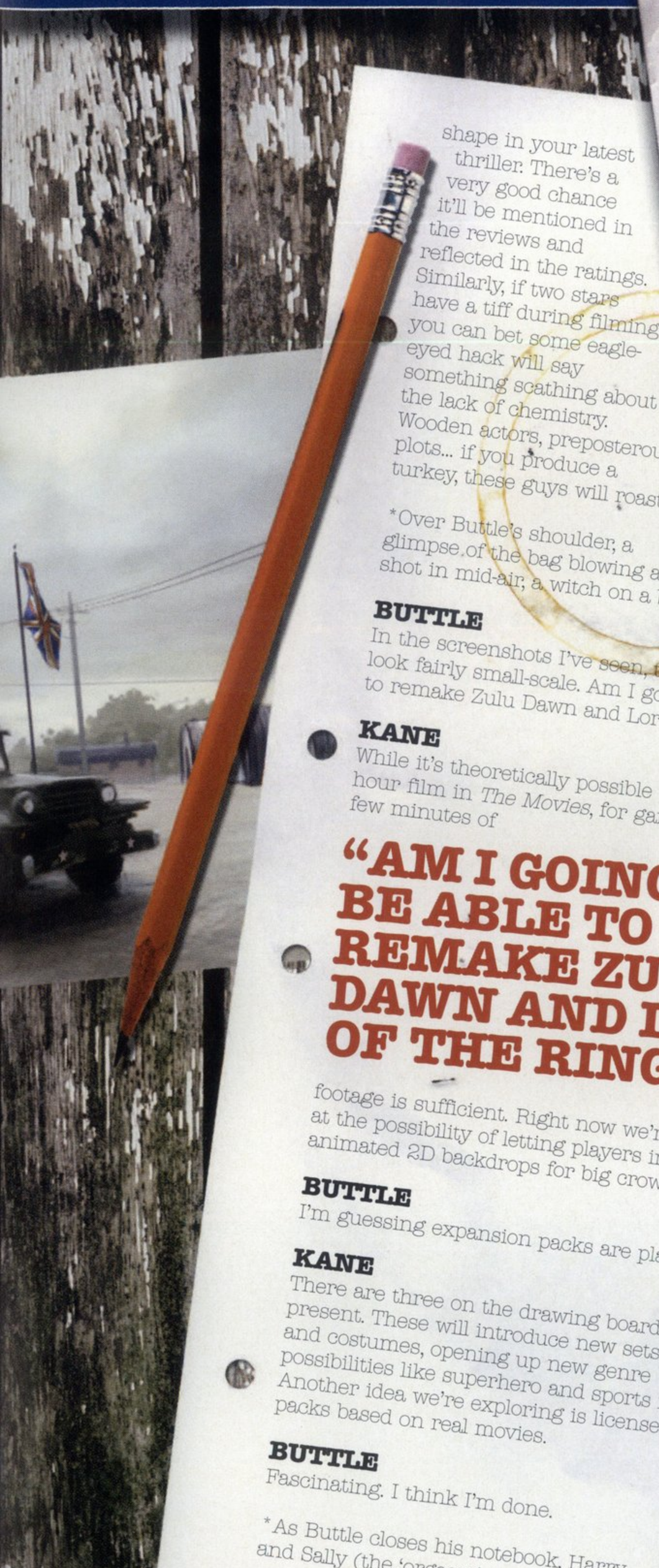
KANE
At the top of the screen there's a scrolling date-bar on which significant world events are reported. Every war, earthquake, epidemic, or meteor scare described up there is a splendid opportunity for you to tap into the zeitgeist with an appropriately themed movie. When...

Kane notices Buttle's attention has shifted to the window. He's watching a white plastic bag dancing in circles in the wind.

Am I boring you?

BUTTLE (*jolted out of his reverie*)
Sorry! The critics. A little about them?

KANE
Perceptive fellows. Nothing gets past them. Say Garrison Ford is looking a little out-of-



shape in your latest thriller. There's a very good chance it'll be mentioned in the reviews and reflected in the ratings. Similarly, if two stars have a tiff during filming you can bet some eagle-eyed hack will say something scathing about the lack of chemistry. Wooden actors, preposterous plots... if you produce a turkey, these guys will roast it.

Over Buttle's shoulder, a glimpse of the bag blowing away. Crossing the shot in mid-air, a witch on a bicycle.

BUTTLE
In the screenshots I've seen, the movies all look fairly small-scale. Am I going to be able to remake Zulu Dawn and Lord of the Rings?

KANE
While it's theoretically possible to shoot a two-hour film in *The Movies*, for game success a few minutes of

"AM I GOING TO BE ABLE TO REMAKE ZULU DAWN AND LORD OF THE RINGS?"

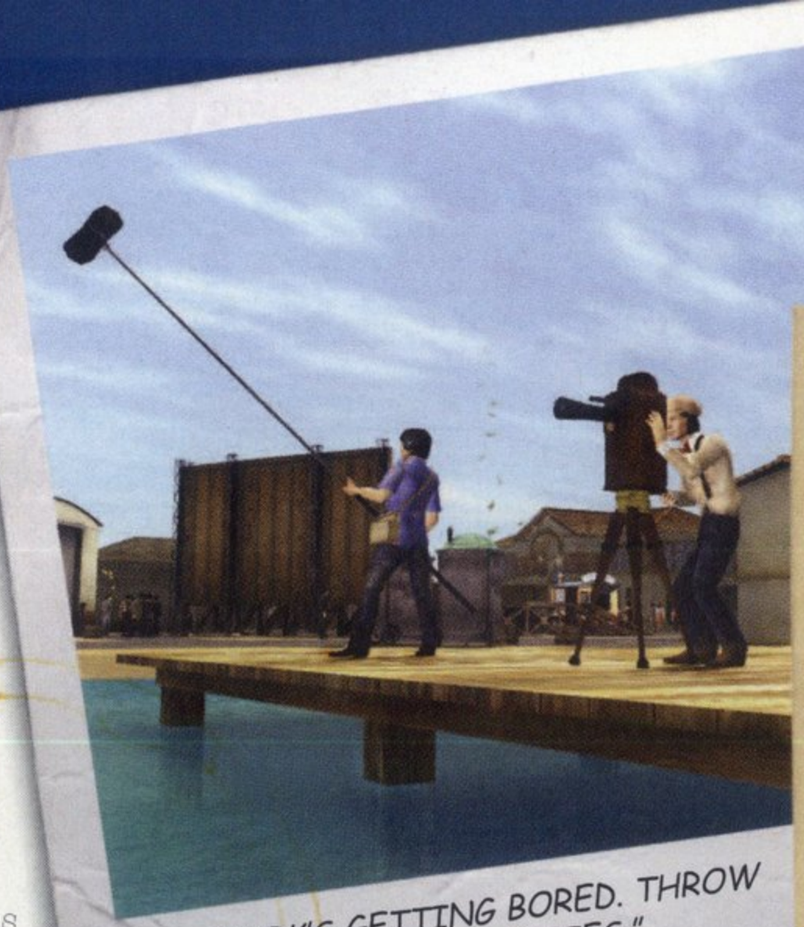
footage is sufficient. Right now we're looking at the possibility of letting players import animated 2D backdrops for big crowd scenes.

BUTTLE
I'm guessing expansion packs are planned?

KANE
There are three on the drawing board at present. These will introduce new sets, props and costumes, opening up new genre possibilities like superhero and sports flicks. Another idea we're exploring is licensed packs based on real movies.

BUTTLE
Fascinating. I think I'm done.

As Buttle closes his notebook, Harry and Sally (the 'orgasm' couple sitting at the next table) jump to their feet brandishing guns



HARRY
Everybody be cool, this is a robbery!

Shocked silence in the cafe. Buttle looks up, not believing what he's seeing. Kane looks less surprised. His right hand is feeling for something under the table.

CUT *A Beretta pistol taped to the underside of the table with festive Xmas tape*

Kane pulls the weapon from its hiding place, aims it at Harry and pulls the trigger. Nothing happens.

KANE
Dammit... not again...

DIRECTOR (*off*)
Cut!

CAMERA PULLS BACK *to reveal a soundstage set up like a transport cafe. Kane and Buttle are walking off the set.*

KANE (*exasperated*)
Shitty props, shitty script. To think I turned down "Wrath of the She-Beast" for this.

FADE OUT

*Cut from completed film

THE GAMER GUIDE TO GENRE IN THE MOVIES

In 1981 film academic Thomas Schatz came along and pointed out that there were in fact only two movie genres – the genre of *order* (all about physical violence and individualism) and the genre of *integration* (all about emotional conflict and assimilation). In 1982 unemployed welder Paul Price came along and pointed-out that while Schatz's theory was intellectually very robust it was a very confusing way to organise a video library.

The Movies, with its eight core genres, takes a pretty traditional approach to film categorisation. ■

WESTERN
Taciturn men, sweaty horses, unconvincing injuns.

ROMANCE
Taciturn men, sweaty women, unconvincing sex.

SCI-FI
Taciturn robots, sweaty aliens, unconvincing CGI.

HORROR
Taciturn mutes, sweaty palms, unconvincing brains.

COMEDY
Taciturn Keatons, sweaty farces, unconvincing wigs.

THRILLER
Taciturn Russians, sweaty phones, unconvincing plots.

ACTION
Taciturn ninjas, sweaty guns, unconvincing wounds.

WAR
Taciturn tanks, sweaty tanks, unconvincing tanks.

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PC GAMES addict

REVIEWS

In which we put every new release to our panel of PC gaming experts.

A pack of pearlers

We'd rather quality than quantity any day.

Some months we must appear like the most cynical, jaded collective of gamers the world has ever seen. While a lot of self-proclaimed hardcore gamers make the mistake of thinking this attitude is what makes their opinions more valid than those that are easily impressed (ie. those that aren't embarassed about enjoying themselves).

As much as we'd love to spread the top releases over the course of the year so we could be equally as excited about what's going on in any given issue, we have absolutely no say in the matter. Sure enough, after an issue devoid of 90+ games, this month we've got three of them. *Far Cry, Unreal Tournament 2004* and *Colin McRae Rally 04* have all landed at once, and *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* is far from a poke in the eye with a blunt stick (although that's a viable tactic for obscuring someone's vision).

So despite having a rather lean line-up of reviews for you this month, at least what's on offer is worth more than a cursory glance. Being stuck for choice is rarely a good thing, but when the limited options are this tasty, it just makes life easier.

ROSS ATHERTON
REVIEWS EDITOR

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THE PC GAMES ADDICT MACHINES

There's no point reviewing new games on old PCs, otherwise we wouldn't be doing them justice. After all, how can you tell how well a game runs until you've seen it on the best machine available?

That's why we've turned to Emagen. Not just because they're able to keep working with an up to date PC to put the games through their paces, but also due to the fact that we're certain that they do the best system assembly in the business. Look at the picture below and you won't find a stray ATA cable or screw out of place. If you're serious about assembling the best machine you can, you'd do well to contact Emagen.

THE PC GAMES ADDICT REVIEW MACHINE:
- AMD Athlon XP 3000+
- Asus A7N8X Deluxe
- Corsair TWINX 512MB PC3200
- 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro
- 19" Mitsubishi Flat CRT Monitor
- Western Digital WD800JB HDD
- 16X DVD, 52x24x52 CDRW
- Antec LanBoy Chassis
- Mitsubishi 104Key Black Keyboard
- Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer

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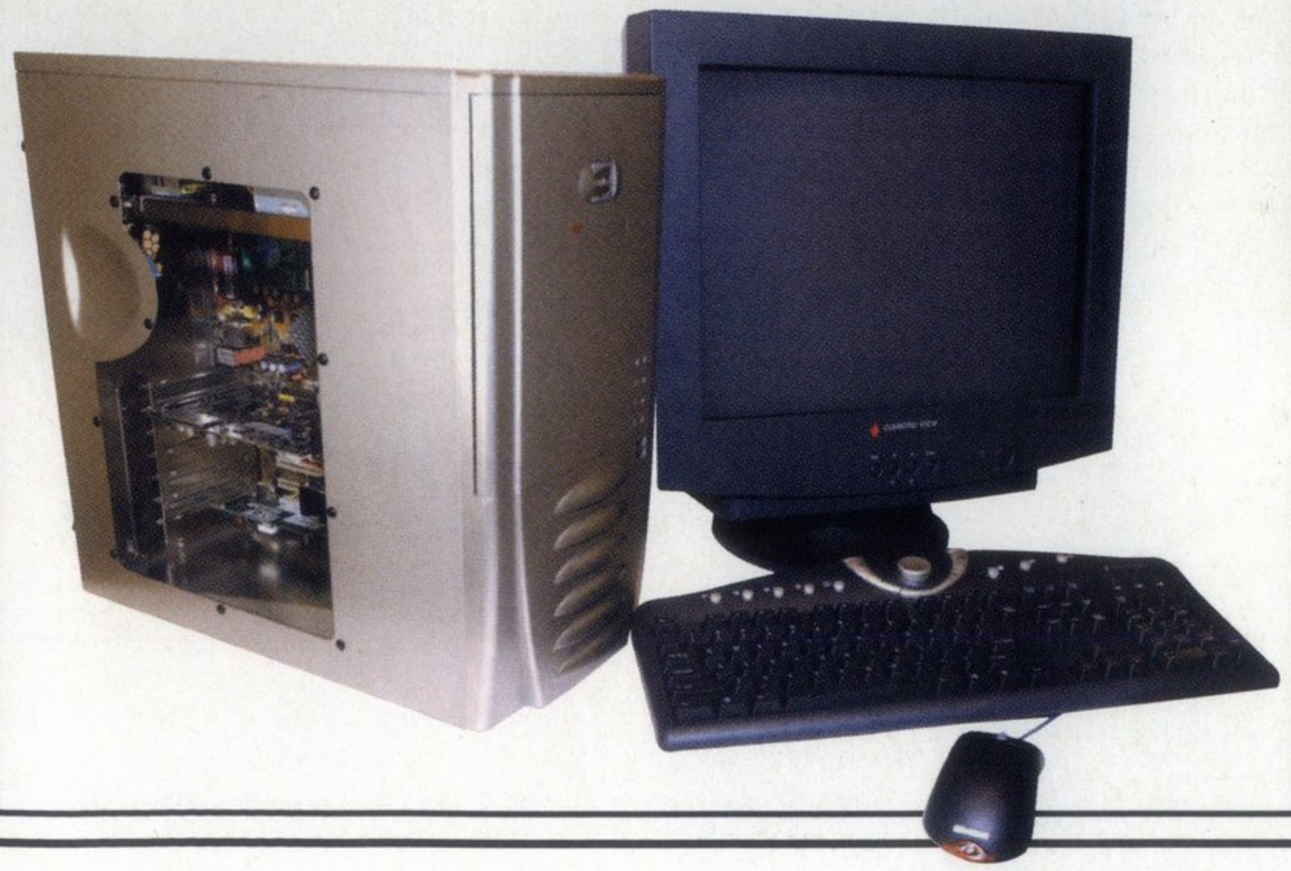


RIGHT TO REPLY

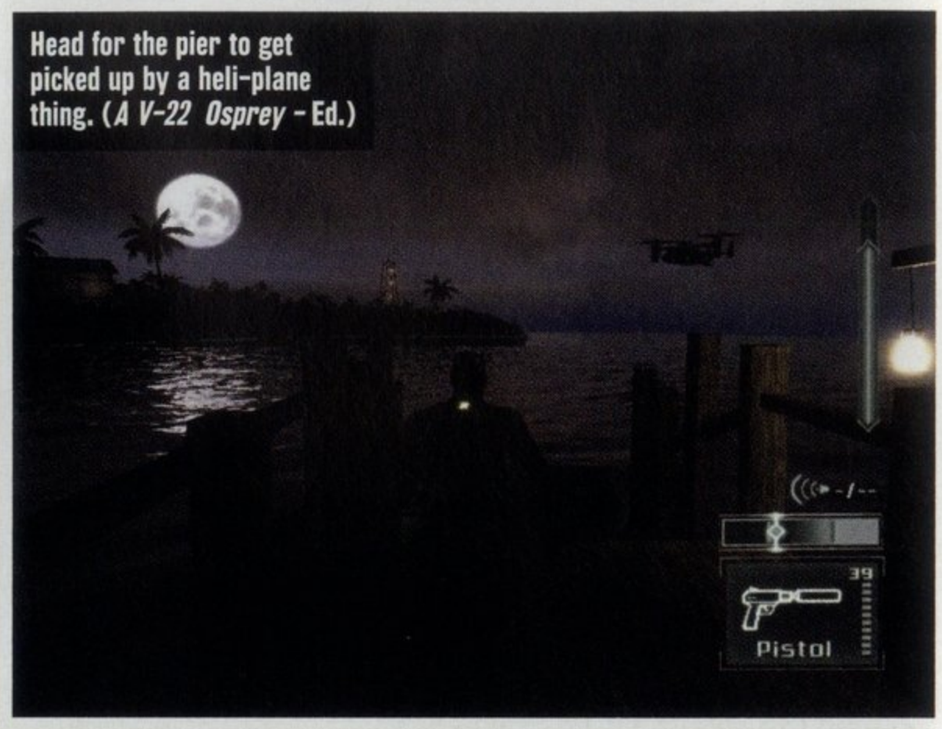
Think we've treated a game unfairly? Or perhaps we've gone too easy on a game. Address your redress to pcga@derwenthoward.com.au or write to us via snail mail by sending your correspondence to Feedback, PC Games Addict, Derwent Howard, PO Box 1037, Bondi Junction, NSW 1355

GENRE: THIRD-PERSON ACTION

SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

Or *Sneaking Around in a Black Latex Condom 2....*

Yes, it's in multi-player-o-vision! Here we see a spy getting caught red-handed.



Head for the pier to get picked up by a heli-plane thing. (*A V-22 Osprey* - Ed.)

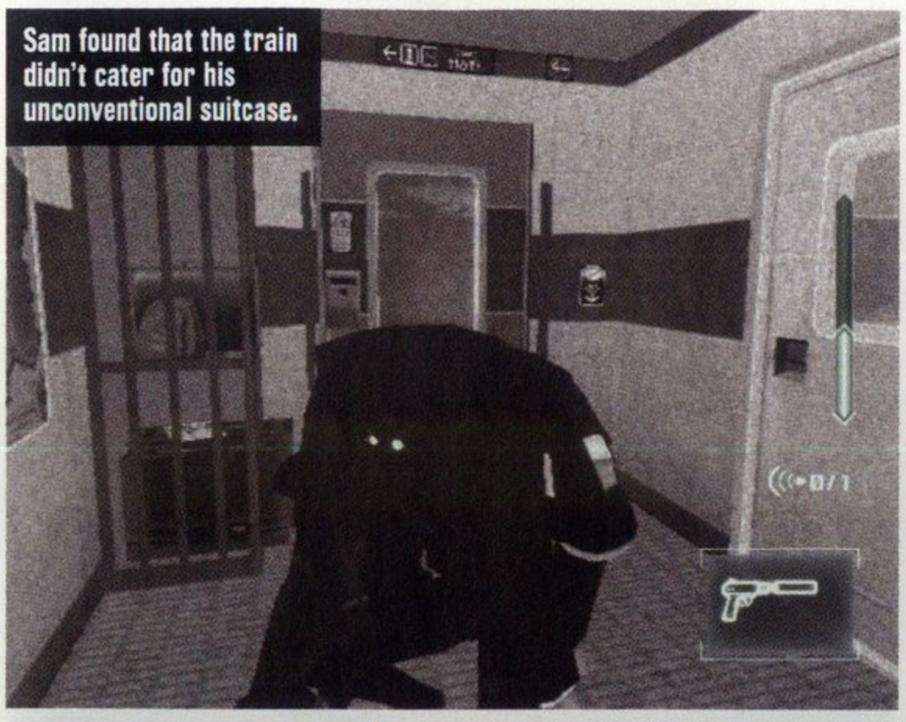
"The buffet is now open for toasted sandwiches, tea, coffee and espionage."

HIDING and not being found has to be one of life's most satisfying experiences. My capacity to squeeze into the weird little shelf under my parents' dining table made me a hide-and-seek superstar, back in the day. Such joys are lost to me now, and it is with sullen reluctance that I am forced to accept that I am now too large to hide effectively. A sad reality for any man-boy to face.

But not all grown men are forced to give up their hiding and sneaking ways. For Sam Fisher, the squatting espionage ace who takes the starring role in *Splinter Cell*, hide-and-seek isn't just a matter of childish pride: it's life or death, not to mention a paycheque at the end of the month. And it has to be said that he's pretty good at it (although even he'd have trouble with that shelf). Since its release, the original game within which he was first digitally imprisoned has found itself under the harsh searchlight of widespread popularity, and I can't help wondering whether much of the appeal of stealth

"The pitch is perfectly judged escapism."

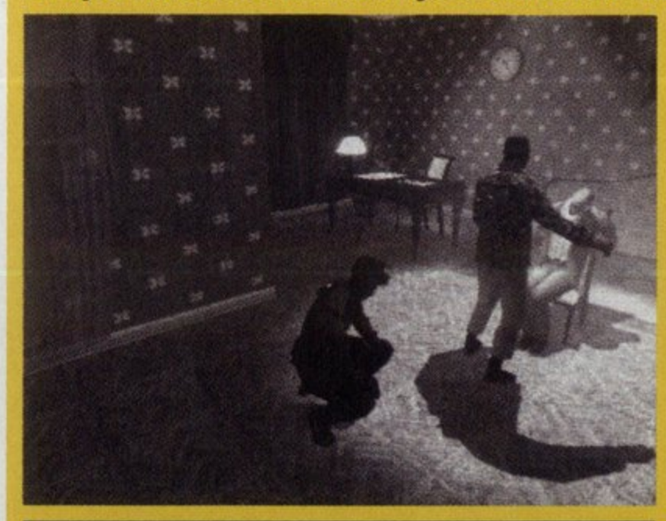
comes from dreams of the kind of skills that everyone wished they had – perhaps even *believed* they had – as a child. Like the enormously popular Tom Clancy books upon which the game is based, *Splinter Cell*'s pitch is one of perfectly judged escapism. We all want to be a near-



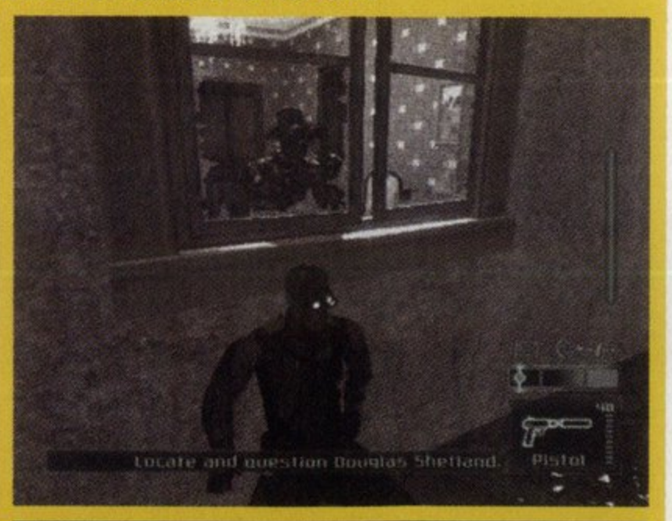
Sam found that the train didn't cater for his unconventional suitcase.

MAKING FRIENDS, BREAKING FRIENDS

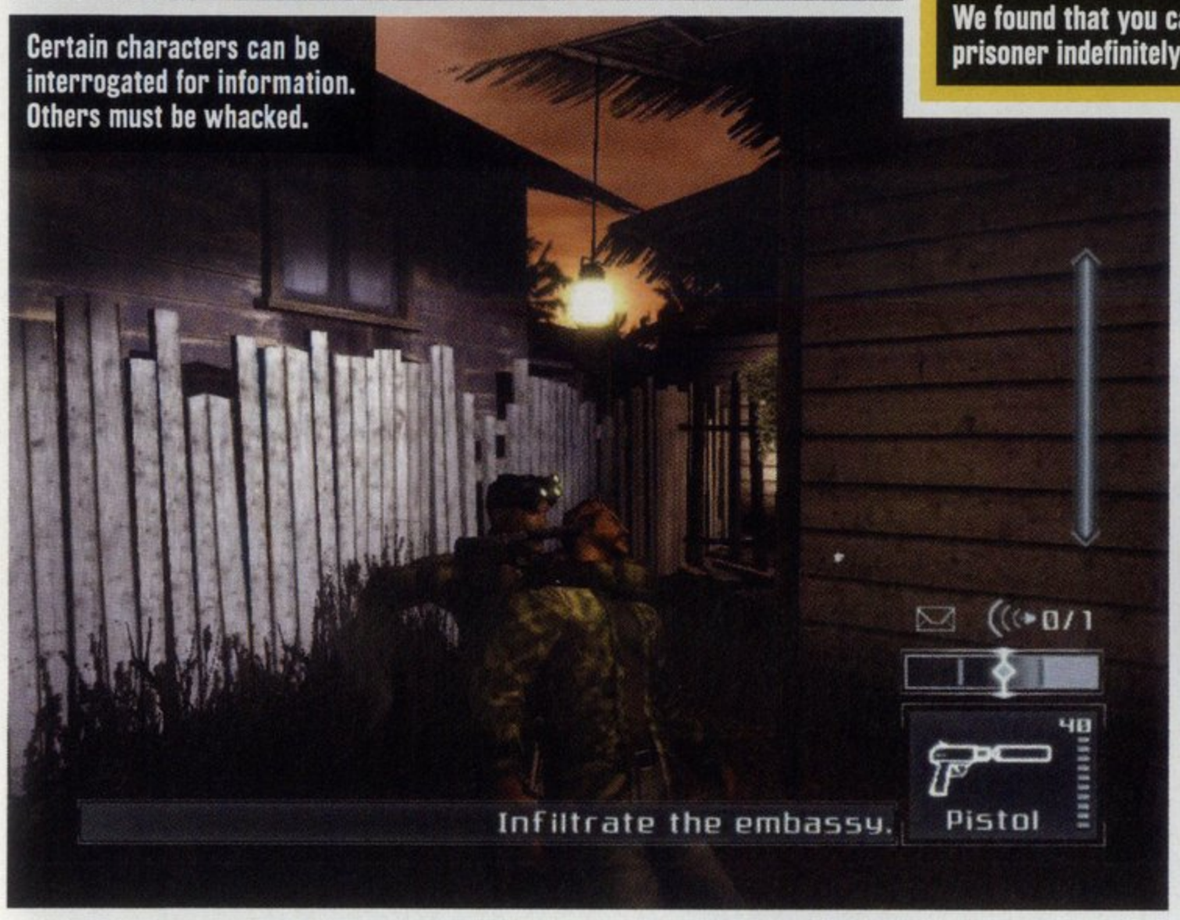
Sam must have magic shoes, since people are seldom aware of him, even when he squats behind them for ages. Here are some sneaking scenes from the first level of *Pandora Tomorrow*...



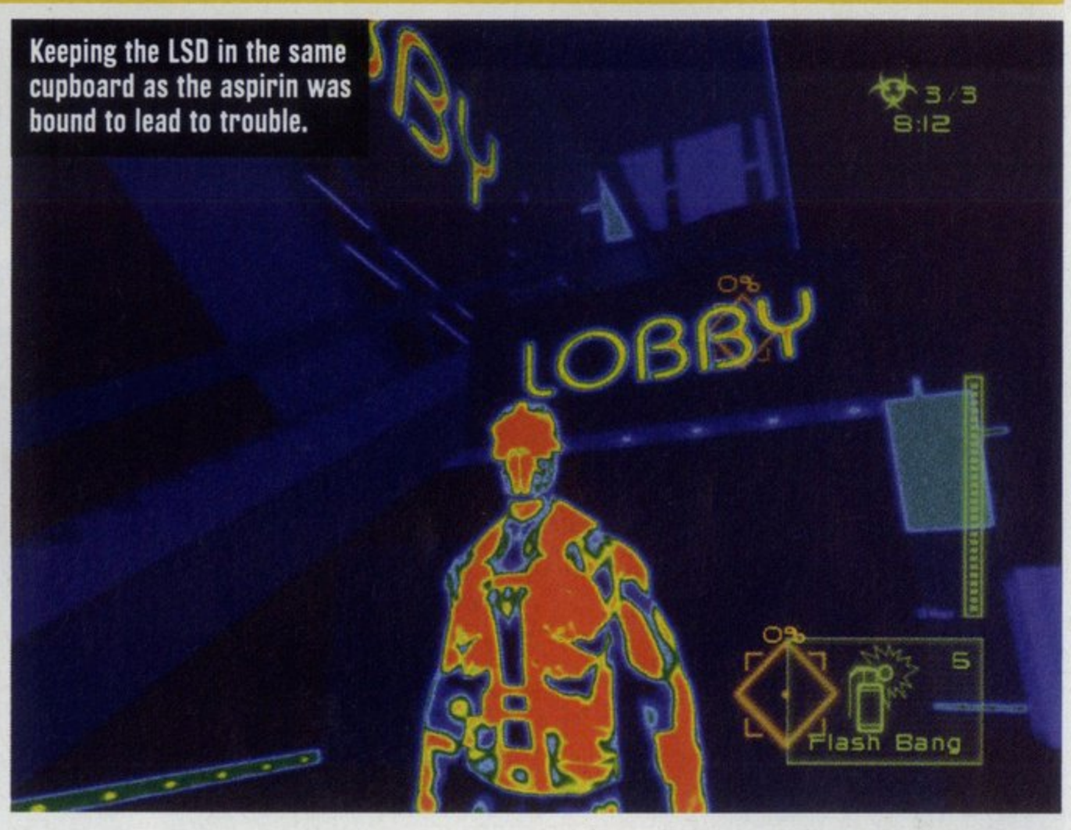
We found that you can watch this fellow beat his prisoner indefinitely. And that isn't a euphemism.



The binocular man might be cross about smashed windows, but he'll have bigger worries soon...



Certain characters can be interrogated for information. Others must be whacked.



Keeping the LSD in the same cupboard as the aspirin was bound to lead to trouble.

Tripped

invisible master of espionage, and this game gives us that chance. But, for all that popularity, we can't help but wince at some ugly flaws. It often feels like this *should* be one of the greatest games of all time, and if it were judged on screenshots and feature-list alone, it might have been just that.

Pandora Tomorrow attempts to do many things within its third-person sneaking remit, and there are significant improvements on the original game, at least in terms of what Mr Fisher himself is capable of. It's still not quite *Crouching Tiger* roof-leaping, but his new-found ability to hop even further up between two close walls, and to move rapidly between small pieces of cover, combined with all his other sneaking and spying skills, make him one of the adult world's premier professional lurkers.

More than ever before, this is a game about staying hidden. Keep your nose clean and avoid bringing attention to yourself for a happy 'Mission Complete' screen. *Pandora Tomorrow* follows closely in the footsteps of its predecessor, seldom departing from the familiar slalom of shadows and clambering. Yet it still occasionally demonstrates some ambition in the way levels are designed, and tries to make the experience excitingly different, which is welcome when a sequel is as close as this is to the execution of the original. Giving players a few more options is always welcome: can you be bothered not to kill the security guard? No, me neither – but the choice *is* there. There are some distinctive and highly successful set-pieces to keep the experience interesting, and the much-touted train level is visually very impressive indeed, even if the challenge itself is fairly perfunctory.

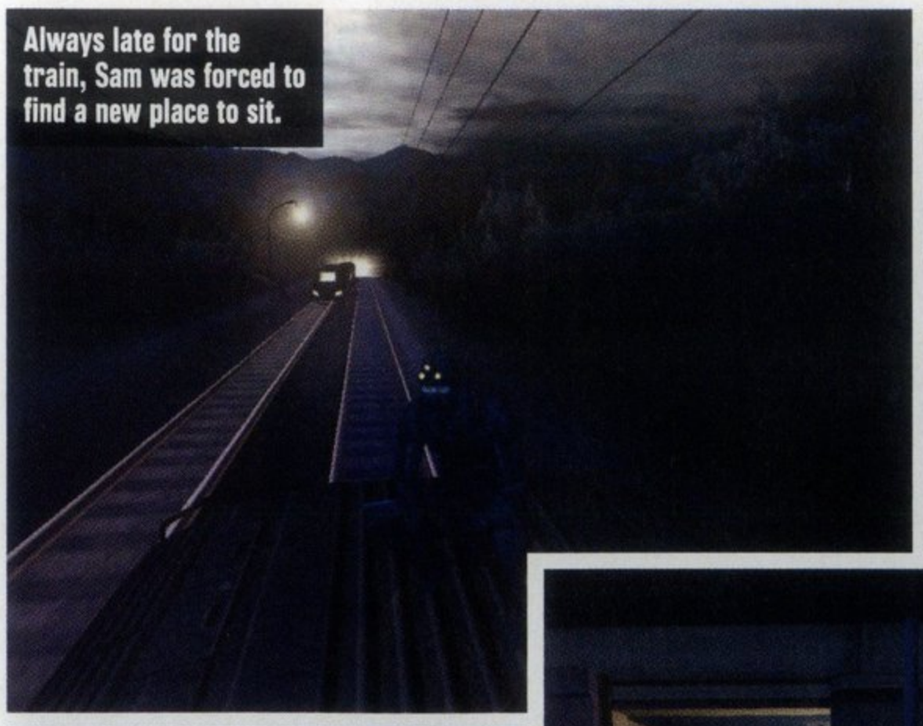
"You whistle, forcing the guard to investigate..."

Objectives are often simply based on keeping out of sight, but occasionally some superb lateral thinking is required. For example: Sam enters a freezing morgue filled with strip-curtains. You hear a cough. Hitting the infra-red goggles reveals a man, lurking at the far side of the room. But there is also something else moving. On closer inspection it turns out to be a gun turret. Retreating behind the curtain, you whistle, forcing the guard to investigate. Using the curtain as cover you're able to knock out the guard and are free to approach the gun and deactivate it. Clever stuff.

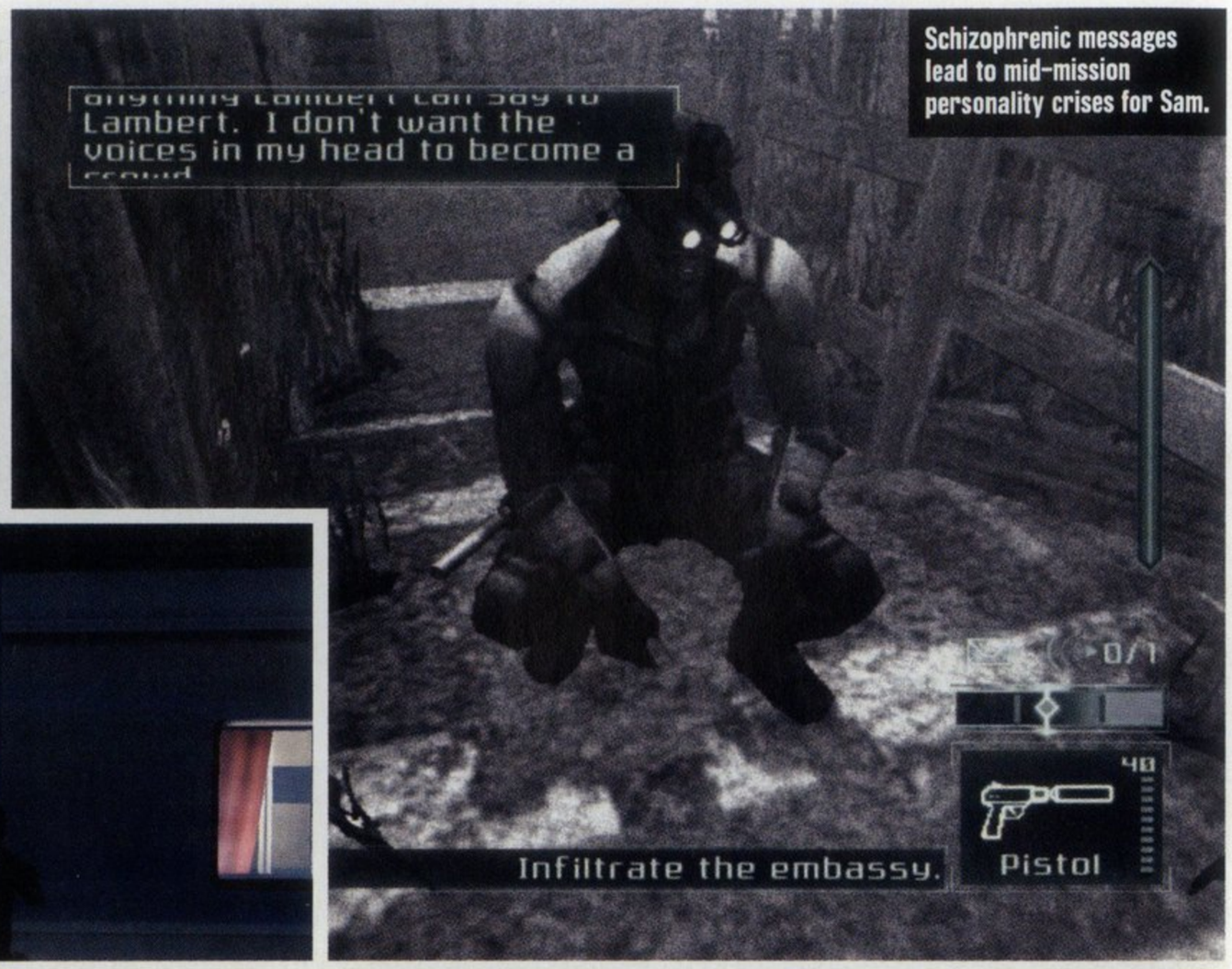
Breaking into terrorist bases and sneaking your way through laboratories will be familiar to anyone who played the original game. Some of the frustrations of the first *Splinter Cell* seem to have been erased – such as bodies being unfairly discovered, although you can still be punished for not hiding them. There are also a few pieces of level design that don't seem to make sense, such as arbitrary triggers that will release guards to search for you, even though they do nothing when you make quite a bit of noise outside the rooms in which they're standing. Moments like this are enormously irritating and don't make for satisfying play. In fact the sheer number of instant death scenarios seems to have increased since the last game, with the player now often being expected to make quite grand intuitive leaps to work out what the hell they're supposed to be doing. The number of times continued over

VICES OF THE DEVICES

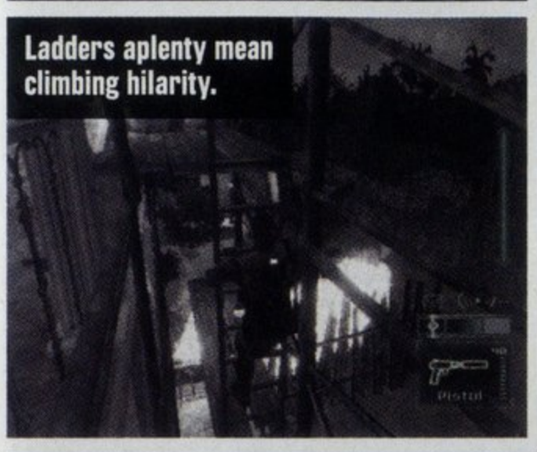
While you'll cuss and spit at the number of times you'll accidentally set off some alarm or other and have HQ shout at you for doing so, there's always a way around every device in the game. Cameras, for example, can be shot or you can use the blind-spot underneath them to get past. Motion detectors are obvious and just require you to sneak past. Guards are the biggest problem, but most of them can be knocked out in the dark. Making the most of your vision modes is a must.



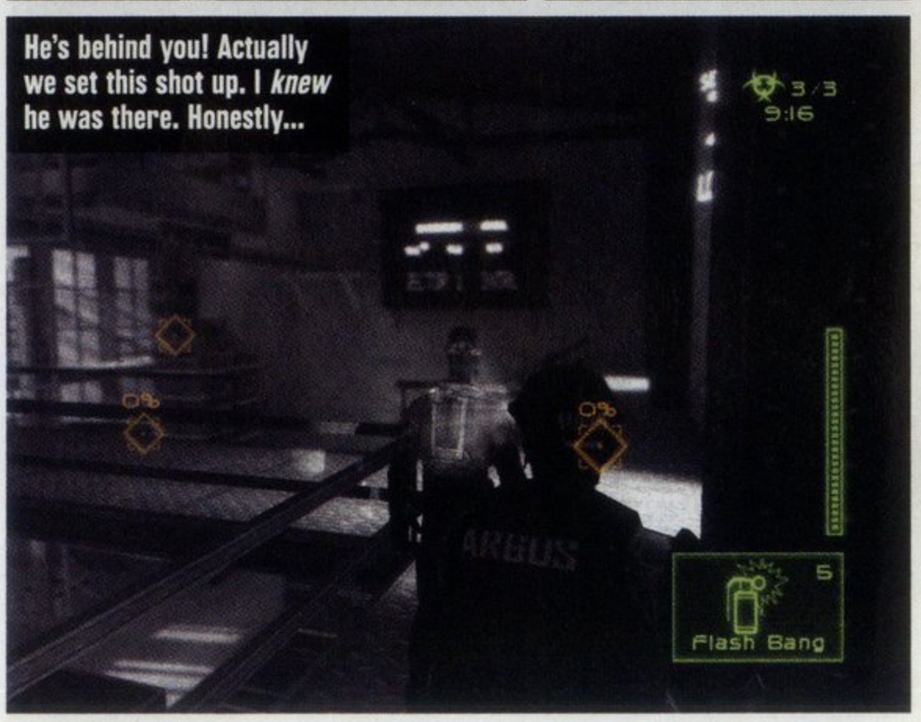
Always late for the train, Sam was forced to find a new place to sit.



Schizophrenic messages lead to mid-mission personality crises for Sam.



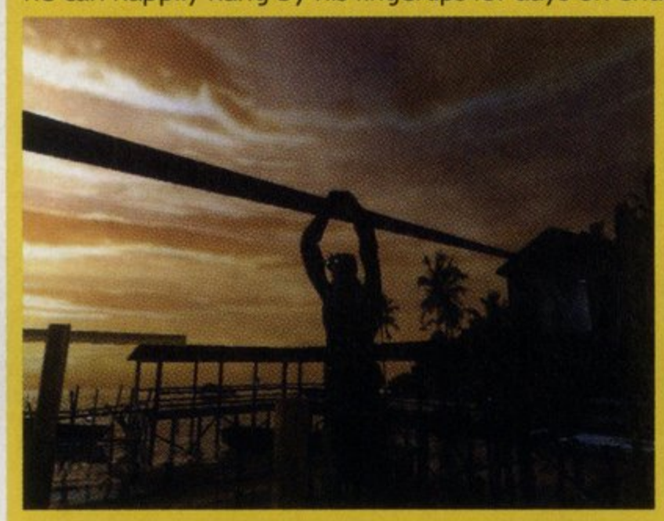
Ladders aplenty mean climbing hilarity.



He's behind you! Actually we set this shot up. I *knew* he was there. Honestly...

JUST HANGING OUT

Sam is the strongest man in the universe. While he can't pick up mountains and throw them like He-Man, he can happily hang by his fingertips for days on end. As we can see here...



Wheeeee! Ahem. Sam never seems to enjoy his rope-slide experiences. He's very serious indeed.

Over-crowding on the 19:08 to Doncaster? No problem for Sam, the cheeky monkey man.

WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND

Often guards will be in a position where Sam is simply unable to approach them, often he's also banned from killing them. In these situations he can either pick up some debris to throw, distracting the guards for that vital moment. Or he can whistle and then hide. The guards will come over to investigate the noise, at which point you can grab them or simply club them around the head until they fall down. Non-lethal, they call it.

that you'll trigger some spurious alarm and have the mission closed for you by the chaps at HQ is quite a passion-killer, and many people will simply not have the patience to get to grips with it. You're going to be saving your game an awful lot along the way, and that's always an ugly gripe to have about a game. That said, the satisfaction of defeating these challenges, even if you've simply bodged it somehow, can be quite invigorating.

The motivation behind all this skulduggery is another plot of terrorist nastiness and counter-intelligence mishaps. Once again Sam Fisher is despatched to deal with international troubles and, given how popular *Splinter Cell* has proved to be, we can probably expect to see this happen several more times in the next few years. This plot might not be particularly interesting, but it still provides an excellent excuse for those of us with a weakness for high-tech military toys to indulge on a grand scale. Spy cameras, silenced weapons, optic cables, computer hacking – all the old favourites make a welcome return.

Perhaps the biggest problem for *Pandora Tomorrow* is that none of its environments feel convincing as real-world situations. They always seem to fall down by reminding you that you're dealing with a videogame level. Although a new non-linearity was much-hyped for *Pandora Tomorrow*, in reality this feature is fairly weak and different routes through the levels really don't amount to very much at

"And who'd have thought *that* would be possible?"

all. Perhaps when developers are able to create more dynamic and believable settings, then games like *Splinter Cell* will really begin to convince us that it is a real-world situation. For now, *Pandora Tomorrow* regularly feels artificial, as if it's all a sinister set-up, a film set.

But for all this, there is one entry on *Pandora Tomorrow*'s list of redemptive attributes that is genuinely interesting: it now boasts a multi-player game. And who'd have thought *that* would be possible?

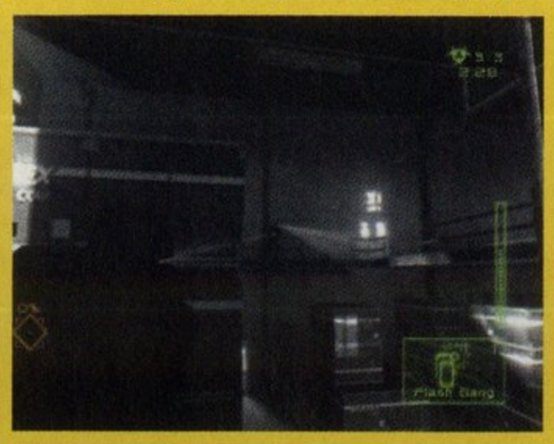
Unsurprisingly, *Splinter Cell* multi-player is a strange beast. It plays host to the conflict between two worldviews – third-person and first-person action. The game pits spies against mercenaries in a battle of stealth, timing and cunning. The mercenaries must protect a facility from sabotage by the spies. The spies follow a similar model to Sam Fisher and are played in third-person. The mercenaries find themselves in a first-person shooter and must hunt down the spies with an assault rifle, some grenades and a few tech-tools that make life easier. The mercenaries are gifted with strange new vision modes to counter the spy, as well as a powerful flashlight and tag-bullets that can be fired to 'mark' a spy, and allow tracking across the level.

The spies' key tool is stealth. They can climb into places where the guards cannot, and they can use the dark to hide. When they get into trouble they're also very good at escaping. Shots from their guns have a temporary taser effect, stunning the guards for a few vital seconds, while the flashbang is one of the most potent weapons, sending the guards' senses reelingi. The spy

YOU'RE NOT ALONE ANYMORE

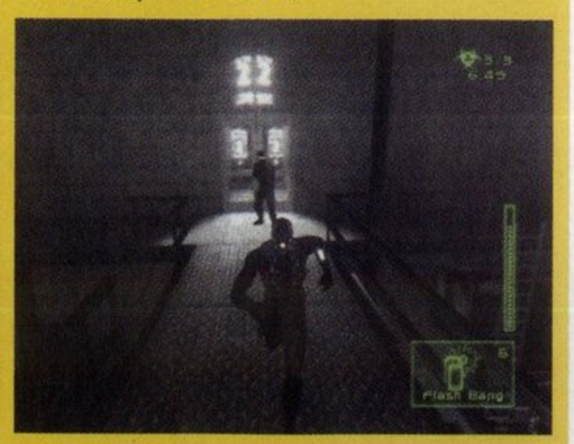
Some of those multi-player moments make your sneaking gland tingle. Here's Jim trying to beat up the disc monkey from 101 PC Games. That sneaky little wretch...

Lasers look even cooler than normal in infrared. This is the bit where my enemy got a taser in the ear for his troubles.



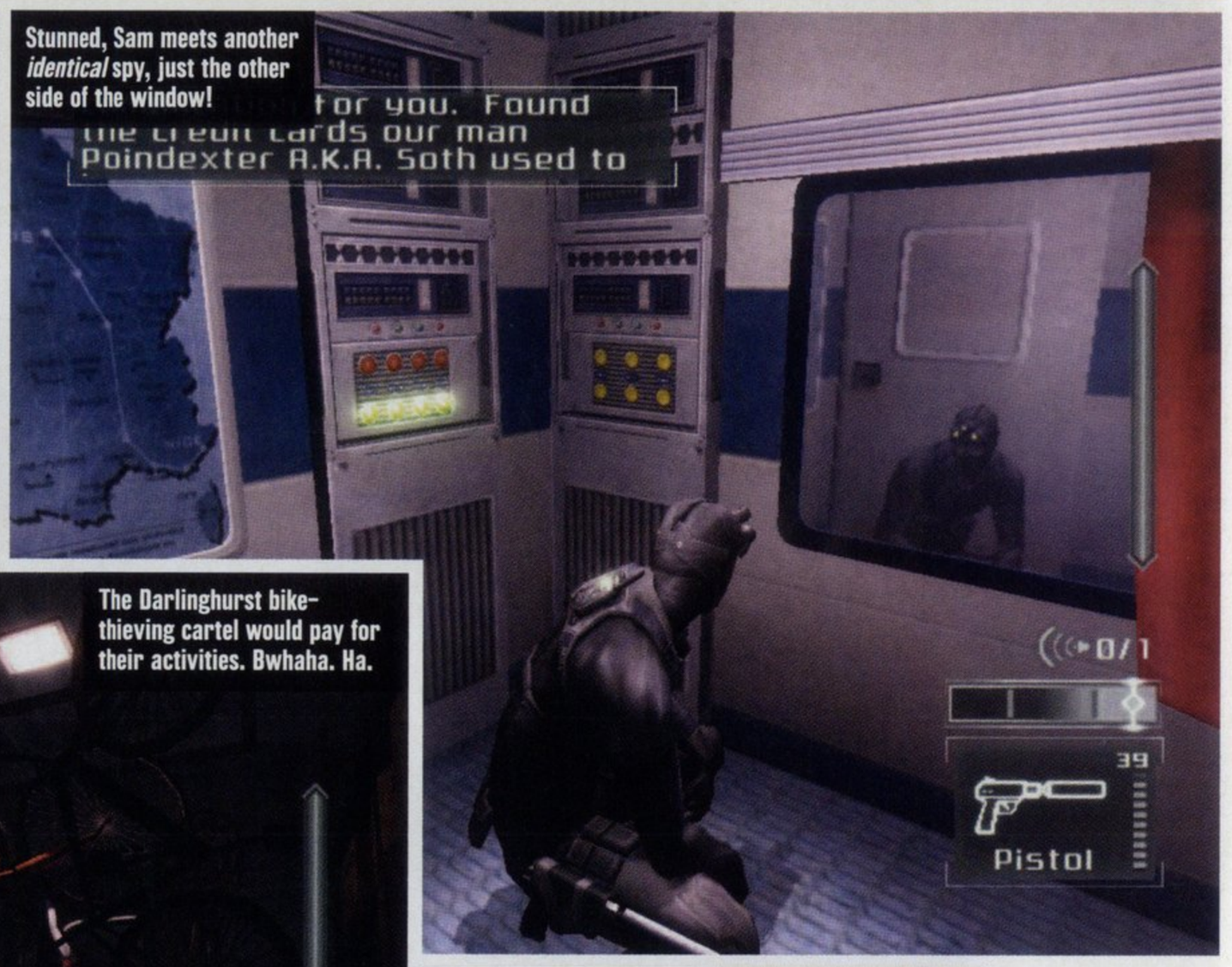
The flashlight effect is about the best we've seen in any game and there's a real buzz to being hunted by torch-wielding guards.

The guards have this motion-tracking vision mode. It makes it hard to navigate, but if you're camping in a dark area it's ace.

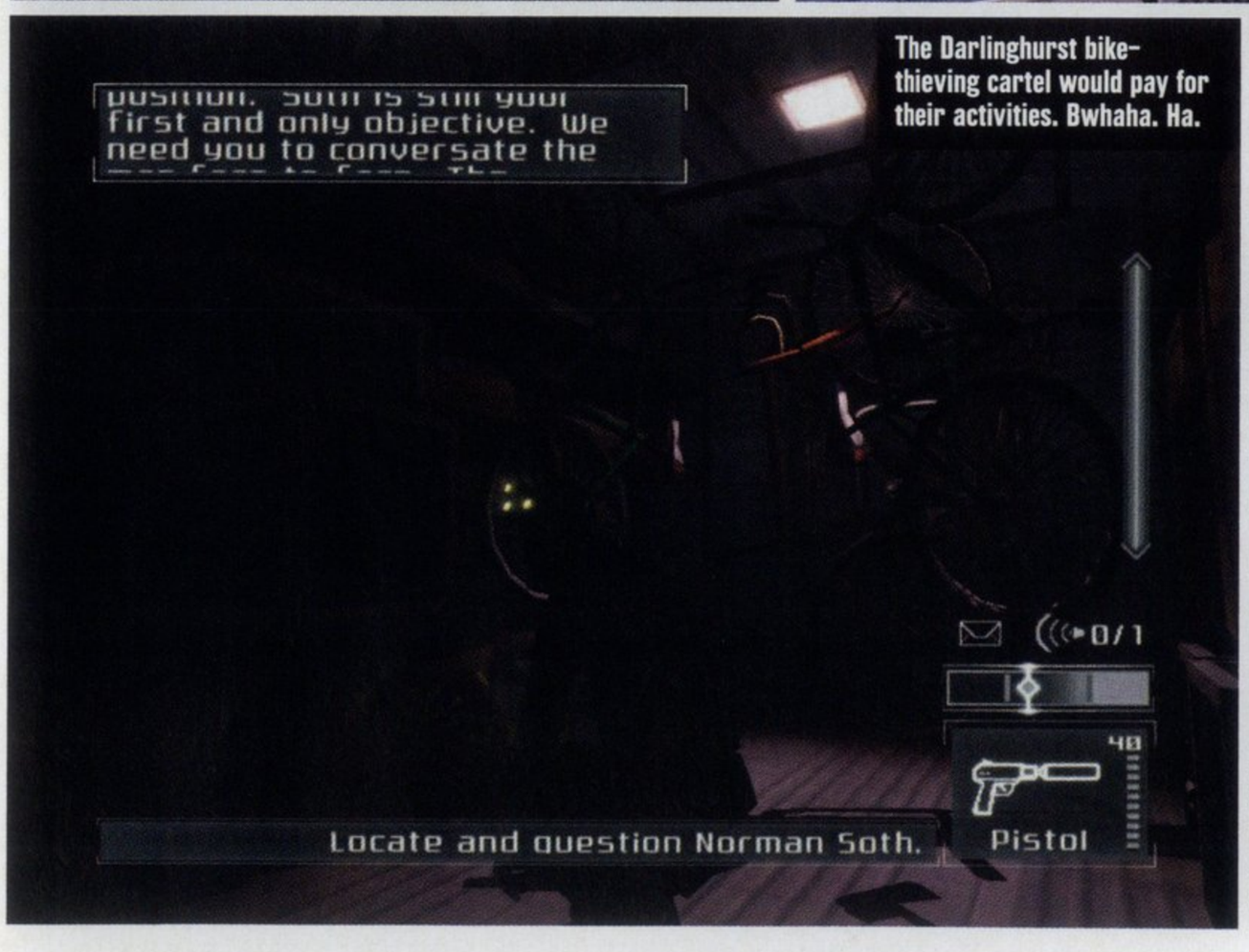


Run away! The spies are brilliant at escaping. Throwing down a flash-bang and scuttling away is a core tactic.

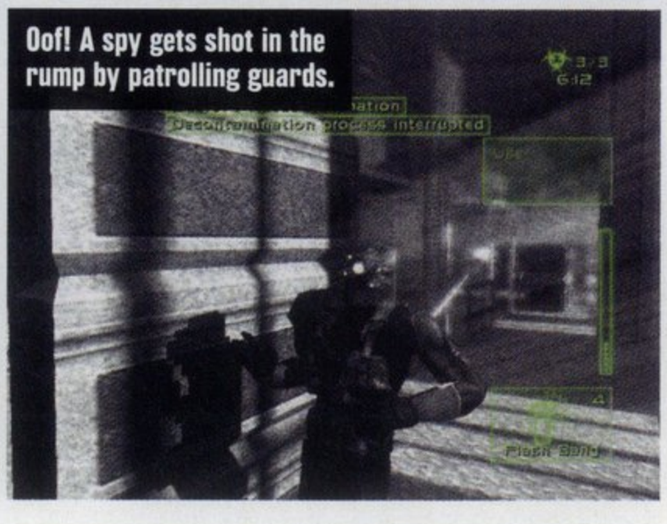
It was all going fine until someone opened the blinds... Hit that reload key.



Stunned, Sam meets another *identical* spy, just the other side of the window!



The Darlinghurst bike-thieving cartel would pay for their activities. Bwhaha. Ha.



Oof! A spy gets shot in the rump by patrolling guards.

FURTHER READING?

While all this is based on the various books written by Mr Tom Clancy, there's no Splinter Cell novel to tie in with the game. Seems like an oversight, doesn't it? Or perhaps it's just one of those meaningless branding exercises that marketing bods think make their experiments in games a little safer. Well, perhaps we'll see some wordy action from Mr Clancy one day, but for now the publishers are keeping tight-lipped. Or are they just in the dark? All this secrecy will come to no good, we'll wager.

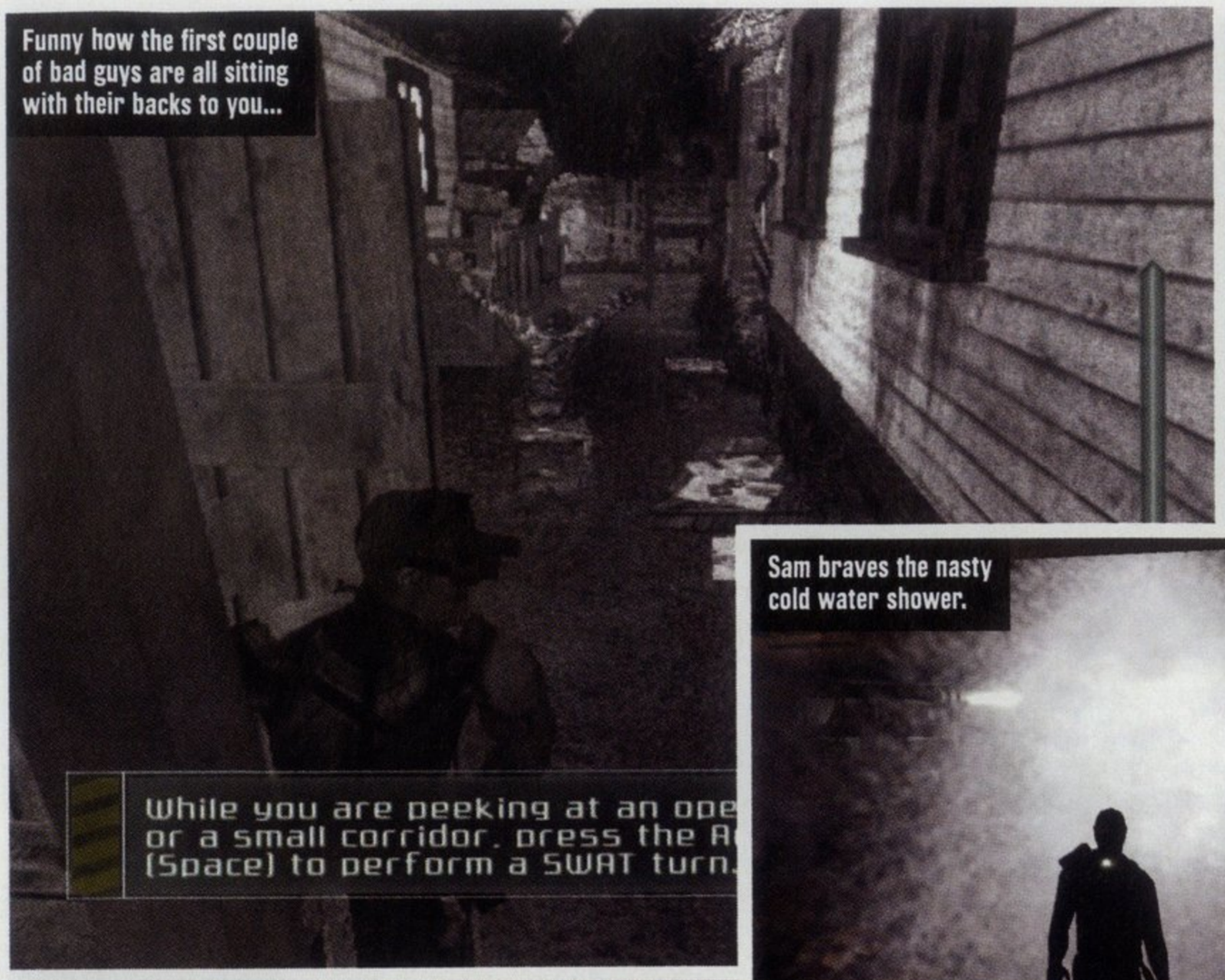
has certain objectives – generally to 'hack' a container in order to neutralise a dangerous chemical cylinder.

The guards are aided in tracking down their quarry by the security facilities of the building, be they cameras or lasers. There's always a way for spies to get round them, but once they're tripped the guards are given the location of the intrusion on their head-up display and can race to the scene. If they know the level particularly well they can even block likely escape routes and gun down the spy as he flees.

It's very hard for us to judge just how well balanced this game is. Even after numerous hours of play, the results (and opinions) vary wildly. There's a maximum of four players in a game, but perhaps a two-guard-one-spy combination will prove most popular – we certainly enjoyed that set-up since it was just terrifying to be the solo spy. While the two classes do seem to counter each other quite effectively, I couldn't help worrying that on a few of the maps it's too easy for the guards to camp out a certain area. Perhaps if a level editor is released then clever amateur designers will try their hand at creating the perfect map.

Unique, engrossing, and filled with toys that don't often appear in multi-player games, multi-player *Pandora* is a strange experience and while not something that we'd insist as being vital to a gentleman's rounded education, it certainly adds an enormous amount to this otherwise rather average game of sneaking. It is, in fact, the core reason why *Pandora Tomorrow* gets the numerical pat on the back that you see at the end of this review. The single-player game alone has not quite earned it.

With *Far Cry* imprinting incredible things on our retinas, the *Unreal*-powered *Splinter Cell* engine is looking a little worse for wear, but it nevertheless drops jaws at certain moments in the game. **continued over**



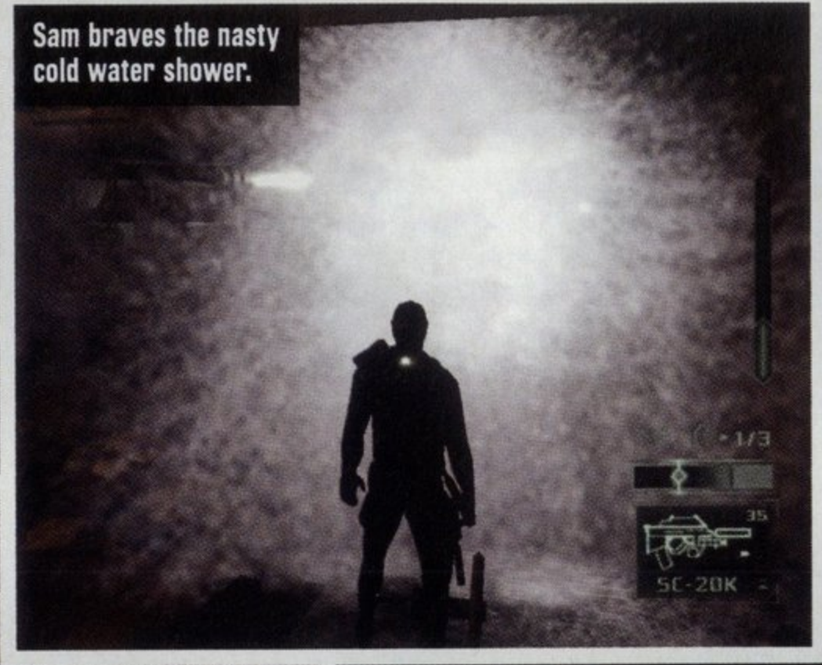
Funny how the first couple of bad guys are all sitting with their backs to you...

SYSTEM MISER

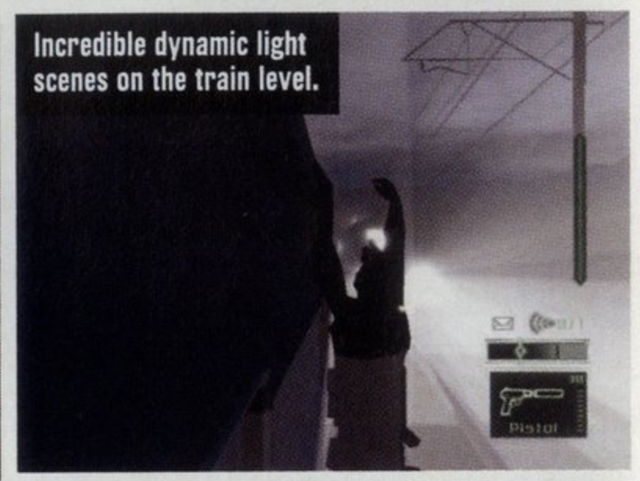
How *Pandora Tomorrow* will play on *your* PC

- Supported resolutions: **640x480 to 1600x1200**
- Scaleable options: **Graphics quality – high, medium and low**

VERDICT: ***Splinter Cell*****'s shadows and complex environments demand a fairly powerful machine to run it capably; newer graphics cards are a must, as is plenty of RAM. However, it looks OK even on lower set-ups, and really fine on a system that can support 1600x1200. The textures aren't amazing, but that's probably thanks to their console origins. Nasty little things.**

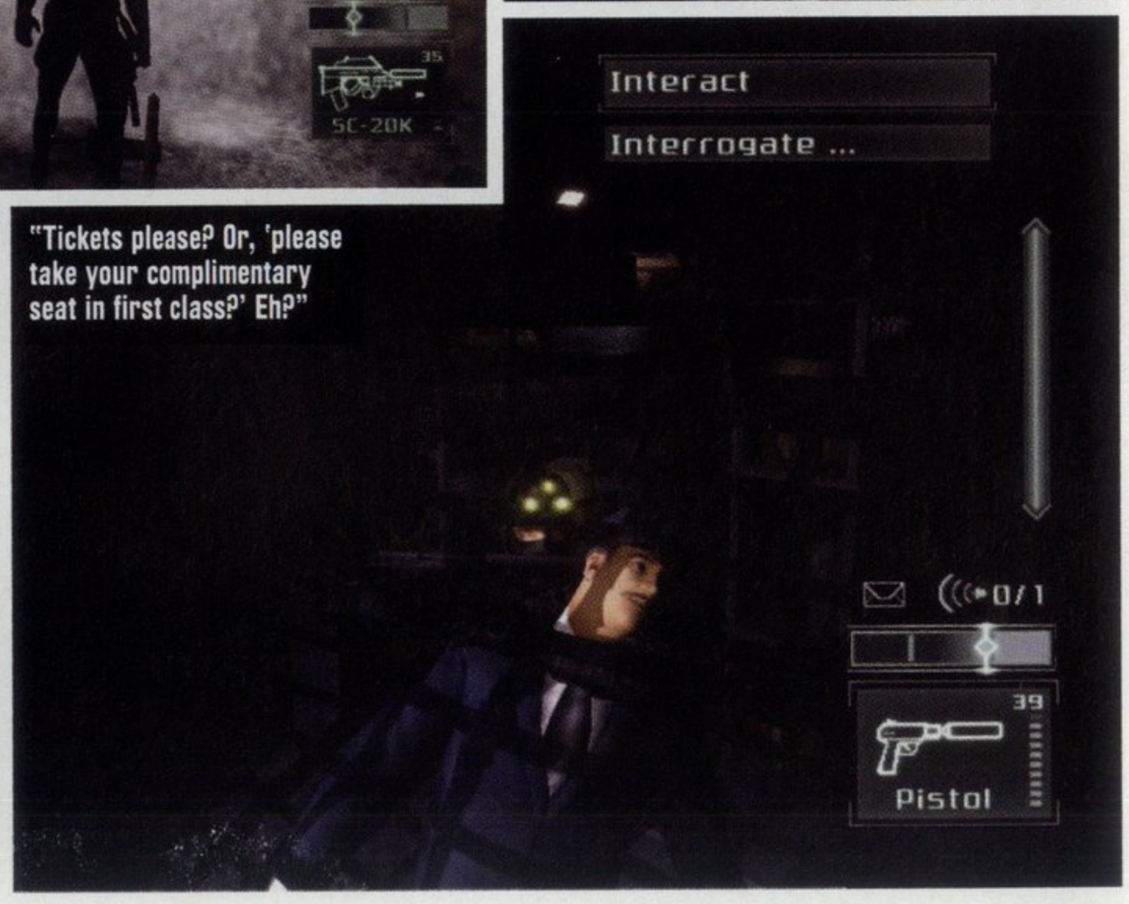


Sam braves the nasty cold water shower.



Incredible dynamic light scenes on the train level.

Check out the routines of the bad guys before making your move.



"Tickets please? Or, 'please take your complimentary seat in first class?' Eh?"

The handling of light and shadow effects is still both visually sumptuous and well implemented for the practicalities of the game itself. There are even a few occasions when light and dark are the whole of the set-piece. We don't want to give anything away here, but a handful of the best situations in *Splinter Cell* arise from use of light and dark. Given that this is clearly the game's strongest aspect, it's good to see the developers making full use of it.

Hopefully, the developers of the next *Splinter Cell* game will overhaul the existing elements and spend some time dealing with the rough edges of level design that we found in this game. Fans of the original game will feel at home, well catered for and so on, but those of you who found it just a bit too much like hard work won't want to return. Then there are plenty of unavoidable deaths and instances of shoddy level design (Sam can climb just about everything, but not these rickety

"An excellent excuse to indulge on a grand scale."

looking fences?), but... well, I'm being hard on this game because I'm slightly disappointed. And for all my criticism there are a dozen times when you'll grunt in satisfied approval at the superb execution of some aspect of the game. I just wish it had been bigger, bolder, better... and, multi-player aside, it really isn't.

Finally, and pleasingly, I can report that although some people have commented that the game could be skewed towards console development for its massively hyped Xbox launch, it works even better on the PC, with the same well-implemented controls we saw last time to make mouse control a pleasure. Remember though: you're going to need a mouse wheel to play effectively, as it controls your walking speed. And if you haven't got one, well, isn't it about time you invested in a shinier rodent? High-tech gadgets, as Sam shows, are the way forward.

JIM ROSSIGNOL

PCGA PROFILE

Splinter Cell 2 is:
- **Online**
- **Harder**
- **Sneakier**

Splinter Cell 2 is not:
- **Fluid**
- **Perfected**
- **Loud**

■ Publisher **Ubi Soft** ■ Developer **Ubi Soft Shanghai Studio** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 128Mb RAM, GeForce 3**
■ Recommended **P4 1.5GHz, 512Mb RAM, GeForce FX or better** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, Internet, up to four**
■ Web Address **www.pandoratomorrow.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

PC GAMES addict
Tougher and with multi-player: for gamers with some real grit and a good deal of patience.

85%

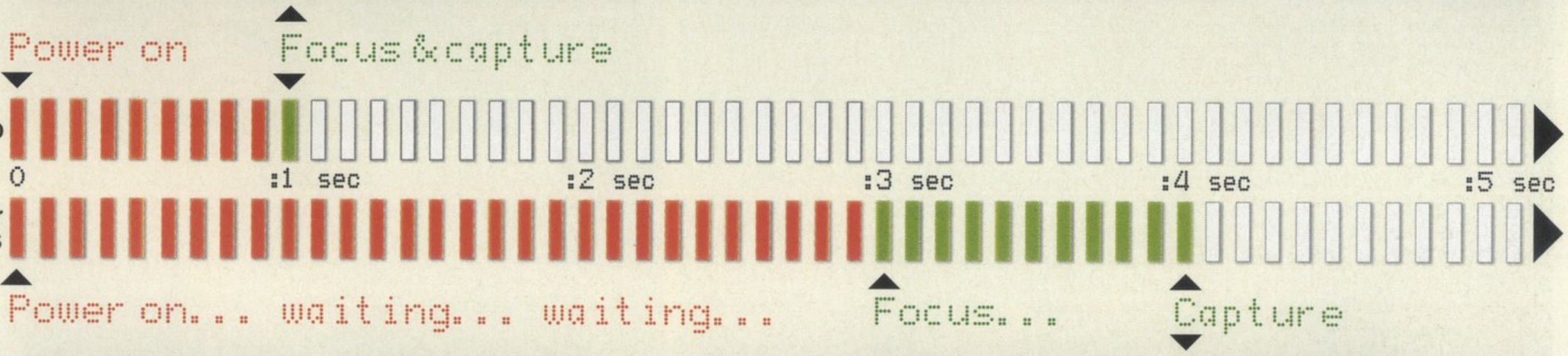
ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Unreal Thievery
A brilliant stealth mod made for the *Unreal* engine but inspired by *Thief*, this is a must.

Thief 2
Even better than the original, the sequel to the game that made *Splinter Cell* possible.

Ricoh 28mm optical lens

Capture the moment with the new Ricoh Caplio RX...



...or miss a lot with an ordinary compact digital

Standard 35mm optical lens

Ricoh Caplio RX

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Capture the moment

GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Not just an annual rehash, but a serious step forward in arena FPS gaming.

LIKE an EA sports franchise, Epic's Unreal Tournament series has shifted into what appears to be an annual release cycle. Looking back over the history of arena-based FPS games like *Quake* and *UT*, this is a serious change in the 'natural' order of things. Gamers will understandably ask questions such as "Will the upgrades be significant?" and "So this'll only last me a year?". Valid concerns, but the bottom line is simple - *Unreal Tournament 2004* is quite simply the best and most comprehensive FPS ever made.

Now that's an awfully big call, espicially when you consider that much of what's in *UT2004* has been rehashed from *UT2003*. Normally that'd be enough to cause a journo like myself to denounce a title, as we PC gamers are subject to too much derivative game development as it is, but when you look at every thing that *UT2004* brings to the table for the first time (or back from the far-flung past of the original *Unreal Tournament*), it's really a simple case of there being so much more on offer than in any other arena-based FPS game ever released. It's not just lots of padding either, *UT2004* offers both quantity *and* quality.

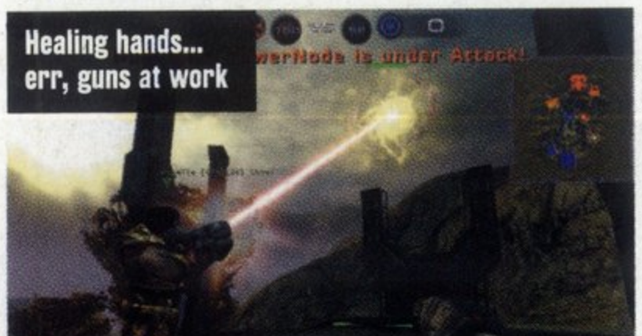
"UT2004 offers both quantity *and* quality."

The first thing to note about *UT2004* is the fact that there are a whopping 10 modes of play on offer, but rather than waste space talking about the seven that were in *UT2003* and the 'Epic Bonus Pack', let's focus on the delights of Onslaught and Assault.

Onslaught is a team-based game that bears much in common with games like *BF1942*, *Tribes* and *Planetside*. Both teams start from a base with a power core, which they must keep in one piece to remain in the game. From there, the two teams race out to take 'nodes', which serve as new spawn points and weapons/vehicle supply stations. We know they're exciting, but more on the vehicles in a moment, as there are serious merits to the node system that highlight the shortcomings of a game like *BF1942*. Teams can only take nodes that are linked to a node they already control (including their base), which makes sending players all over the map to claim respawn points impossible. Combat ends up being localised to one or two key points, which genuinely helps ensure all players are involved in the action. Also, with nodes serving as

FRIENDLY FIRE

One of the more versatile weapons throughout the UT series has been the link gun. Now it's more versatile than ever in the Onslaught maps, as they serve as a sort of 'plasma hurling repair device'. Alt-fire at a friendly vehicle or a node under your team's control and you'll start repairing it. Just like in any good RTS title, having multiple people work on the same task gets the job done faster. Having a couple of players repairing something as it comes under fire while other team mates take on the enemy works wonders. Team play always wins.

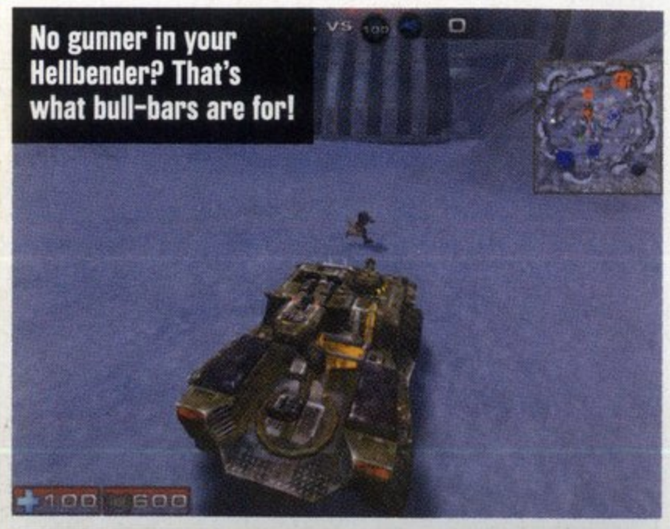


A VARIETY OF VEHICLES...

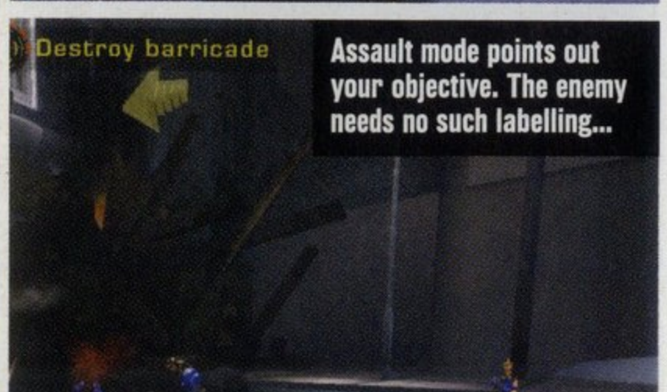
There's a grand total of eight different vehicles that you can take the "wheel" of in *Unreal Tournament 2004*, but these two war machiners are the PCGA favourites.

Goliath Tank (seats 2) – One player drives and controls the main gun while the other operates a chaingun to fend off faster targets

Raptor (seats 1) – Everyone scrambles to get into these, and no wonder. Fast, agile and fires plasma shots and homing missles.

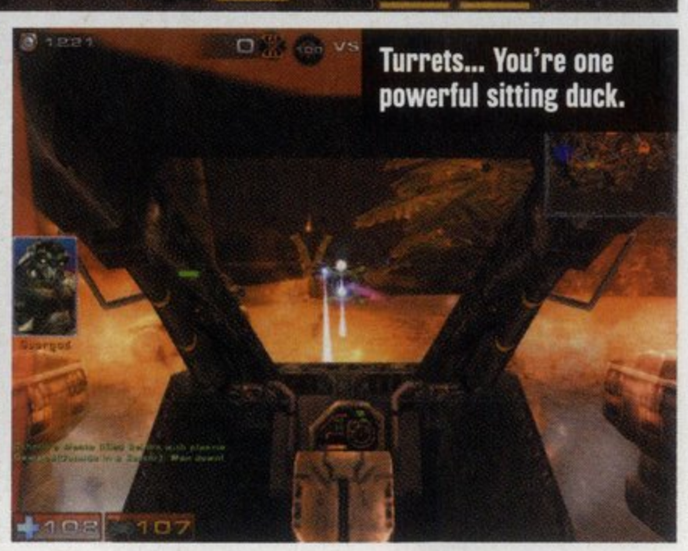


No gunner in your Hellbender? That's what bull-bars are for!



Assault mode points out your objective. The enemy needs no such labelling...

Bombing Run returns with much spiffier maps.



Beauty

teleporters, and vehicles covering ground fast, there's no need for long footslogs across the massive maps that are featured in Onslaught matches. Players arriving at a node their buddies are trying to defend can work on repairing the node as it comes under fire, manning a turret (of which there is almost always at least one), or whatever else seems appropriate.

Only when a team has pushed all the way across the map to control nodes near their enemy's base can they actually launch an assault on the core, so unless there's a serious difference in skill between opposing teams, the tide of battle often swings back and forth. Onslaught is well designed team-gaming at its finest.

Okay, on to those vehicles. Lets take the ease of use and gorgeous third-person perspecitve (first-person is still an option) of *Halo's* vehicular action, work in the mult-manned rides of *BF1942*, and top it off with six very diverse land and air-based vehicles and you've got *UT2004's* impressive collection of war machines. There's the single-seater Manta hovercraft and Scorpion support dune-buggy, the two-seater Goliath tank, the three-man Hellbender jeep, the massive five-man Leviathan supertank and the agile yet fragile Raptor to dominate the skies. Players can swap seats freely in the multi-personel machines, and every one of them is intuitive to control for anyone who can play

"Onslaught is well designed team gaming at its finest."

a FPS with some vague proficiency. By using the mouse to pan the view around , as well as the mouse-wheel to zoom in and out, players can expect to jump in and help out their team effectively from their first game. Fantastically forgiving physics make spectacular jumps, crashes and stunts commonplace. It's all as it should be.

Although dropped for *UT2003*, Assault mode has made a triumphant return from the old *UT* in spectacular fashion in this latest instalment of the series. For the uninitiated, two teams take turns at the same scenario, where one is defending/escorting and the other is unsurprisingly, launching an assault. There's no excuses for getting lost or failing to understand what you're meant to be doing, regardless which side you're on as there's a clearly narrated walkthrough of the objectives, and an arrow that points to the current objective of the match for all players.

There's even a couple of new vehicles thrown into the mix, specific to the scenario at hand. For example, one of the maps is set in space, with a pitched battle involving a Skaarj (the old enemy from *Unreal I & II*) mothership. Both the humans and the Skaarj have their own one-man space fighters. Regardless which map is being played, the turrets, vehicles, and other continued over

UT2004 ON THE GO

Although we're not about to pretend that UT2004 isn't going to look its best on a beefy desktop system that we've all come to expect to have to own to play a title like this, Epic have made a real effort to cater for the laptop owning world. The 'Pixomatic' software rendered allows for reasonable performance on mahcines without 3D hardware. It's great news for folks with a decent notebook that has one of those generic built in GPUs. Nice touch!

WONDERFUL NEW WEAPONS...

Some are just making a comeback while others are delicious debutant dealers of death. If they won't kill you, maybe my over use of alliteration will...

Grenade Launcher: Launch up to eight 'sticky' grenades, then use alt-fire to blow the lot. Smart players can load up vehicles like a mobile bomb - bail out and BOOM!

Sniper Rifle: Brought back from UT, but now it emits a puff of smoke that gives away the sniper's position, and obscures their vision, making it tricky to fire rapidly. Much fairer.

Mine Launcher: Truly evil when used smartly. Fires spider-mines that move towards enemies. Alt-fire draws the mines to a laser marked spot - Mobile minefield!

AVRiL: This anti-vehicle rocket launcher is perfect for bringing down airborne targets, as it locks onto their heat signature immediately. Also a potent tank-buster.

Assault and onslaught maps give players the option to use turrets... Ideal for holding back enemy rushes.

Tanks are tough, but make easy targets...

Mantas are fast, but not fast enough this time...

SYSTEM MISER

How *Unreal Tournament 2004* will play on *your* PC

- Supported resolutions: **640x480 to system max**
- Scaleable options: **Texture/filter/anisotropic rendering quality...**

VERDICT: **To see *Unreal Tournament 2004* with everything cranked up high then you'll need a fairly beefy system, but to get something that looks good and plays well only requires a vaguely contemporary machine. We had very satisfying results with an Athlon 2100XP with 512MB RAM. The only thing you may be pressed for is HD space - this baby weights in at 5.5GB!**

features have been worked in so that they seem like part of a stand-alone scenario, rather than something forced to works with the existing *UT* framework.

On top of these two modes, which quite honestly could have been bundled as a stand alone product any FPS gamer would have reached for, Epic have gone to lengths to out-do themselves on pretty much every front with *UT2004*.

AI has been given a shot in the arm, with bots working with great efficiency in both team and FFA situations. About the only exception was that they tend not to leap on the back of a vehicle a human player is driving/piloting as they do in *BF1942*. They do however drive, dodge and repair nodes with all the nouse of a homosapien, and the single-player game is better for it. On high AI settings, bots can prove more challenging than humans, making them more than just something to practise on.

Now add to all of that the fact there's over 100 maps, dramatically improved

"Bots can prove more challenging than humans."

menu and HUD systems as well as comprehensive voice support, and you've got a game that covers all bases and does it with style. If you've got a USB headset with a mic, you can use it to issue commands to bots, as well as barking orders at those team mates that never do what you want.

Oh and of course there's that thing that we all love to pretend we're not shallow enough to care about - the visuals and sound. From gunfire to the crunch of vehicles ramming into one another, everything looks and sounds spectacular. This may not be the same technology pusher that say *Doom III* looks to be, but then again, I'll eat my hat (okay I don't own a hat, but you get the idea) if Id's upcoming FPS is half as fun multi-player as *Unreal Tournament 2004* has proven to be.

Quite frankly, if Epic can push out something tasty on an annual basis, FPS fans won't care how much material they rehash or take inspiration from. The bottom line is this, it's all in there, and it's all very, very good. Go grab *Unreal Tournament 2004* You're missing out until you do so.

DAN TOOSE

PCGA PROFILE

UT2004 is:
- **Gorgeous**
- **Feature packed**
- **Frustrating**

UT2004 is not:
- **For pacifists**
- **Going to fit on a mostly full HD**
- **A lame annual update of a big name series**

■ Publisher **Atari** ■ Developer **Epic** ■ Minimum System **PIII 1GHz, 128Mb RAM, 5.5Gb HD, 64Mb 3D card**
■ Recommended **P4 2Ghz, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN/Internet, up to 32 players**
■ Web Address **www.unrealtournament.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Battlefield Vietnam
The other FPS of the moment that's geared for awesome team-play action.

Planetside
An alternative if you insist on a futuristic look to a team oriented FPS.

PC GAMES addict

A fair amount of re-used material, but all the new stuff is more than worth shelling out for. Sublime!

94%

JET LI

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M 15+

GENRE: RPG/RTS

WARS & WARRIORS JOAN OF ARC

Joany, Joany, loves a fight, but hides away on bonfire night.

Sieges are great – you get cannons and all sorts.

Swirling mass melées are all part of the deal. Moustachioed Kentish axemen are a bonus.

Spearheading attacks is *ace*.

KNIGHT TO CASTLE

Castle sieges are all part of the fun, and with a bunch of NPC knights, archers and siege engines at your disposal, you really feel like you're in control of an army. You can swing the balance by charging to the front line and tearing sections of enemy soldiery apart yourself, and with four generals powered up with stacks of fruity combo moves, you can lay down an awful lot of damage.

SEVERAL things occurred to me when I began playing *Joan of Arc*. Firstly, a woman (or man, for that matter) clad in full plate armour would have trouble jumping half a foot off the ground, let alone as high as our Joan can – about seven feet into the air. This is silly.

Secondly: Jumping Joan (action figure coming soon!) meets knee-high obstacle. Knee-high obstacle remains staunchly impassable. You know the score.

Thirdly: it's the kind of game that increases your risk of mouse-finger RSI. As the Maid of Orleans herself, your task is to range through the medieval French countryside battling countless English soldiers, and the way it's done is by running up to them and whacking them until they fall over. Hack-slash-hack-slash-hack-poke-hack. This risks becoming boring.

Buy new gear from this man.

But somehow, it never does. I set off deep into the bowels of the country with reasonably low expectations. And a little way in, something wonderful (and wholly unexpected) happened: despite early indications of naffness, *Joan of Arc* began to grow on me. Make no mistake, it's a game that fairly jiggles with technical howlers, and

"Will coddle you into a frothing spume."

will definitely, *at least* once, coddle you into a frothing spume. The camera is often terrible, the movement and vision controls swing between hair-trigger sensitivity and club-fisted clumsiness, the NPC troops assigned to you boast sub-standard pathfinding, and for all their willingness to send the marauding Britons back to the Angle Isle, they have their moments of lunatic Benny Hill style capering. And they get glued to scenery too, which is *really* irritating.

And yet, despite its faults, there's something quite enthralling about it all. It's actually a great story to base a game around, because so much of it is actually true. Joan of Arc really did get stuck in with the boys, swing a huge sword, and wear a tank-like suit of full plate. And to any seasoned gamer, the embellishments inscribed on top of the core tale are quite in keeping with the setting. There are a few RPG elements, for example: combat experience brings with it advancement points, which can be spent on boosting your stats and buying new sword combos. Plus, you'll come across new weapons and items that confer bonuses to your damage output, defence, speed and so forth. Not a twangly spell in sight either, for which we're thankful.

The plot very loosely follows Joan's brief yet bright career as a warrior, as she led France's soldiery into battle against the invading English. In game terms, you take on a series of missions, and it's the structure of these adventures that makes the game more than the sum of its patchwork parts. Each mission is set across a fairly large geographical area (and can we just say, all praise the mini-map, without which you'd become hopelessly lost), within which multiple objectives must be achieved. And for the most part, it's seamless; there's some excellent use of the day-night cycle, and weather has a tangible impact on the atmosphere. Here's an example: a mission

While it can be unresponsive, the RTS interface simplifies unit command.

ARMS AND THE WOMAN

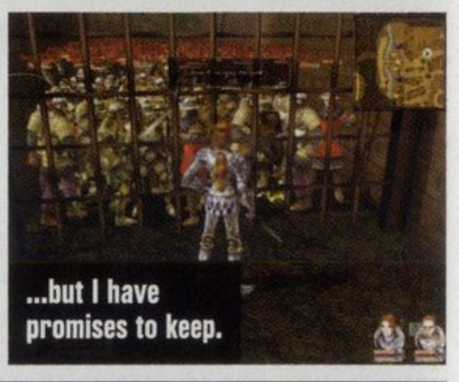
Joan's armies (no, not the ones up her sleevies) consist of many troop types.

Knights: tough, hard-hitting, and go 'CLANG!' when they're struck. Knights form the spine of your army.

Don't tell him, but the man-at-arms is pure cannon-fodder. The archer, behind him, knows this.

Big power-moves can take down whole groups.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep...



...but I have promises to keep.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Joan of Arc* will play on *your* PC

■ Supported resolutions: **1024x788** ■ Scaleable options: **Shadows, draw distance, dynamic grass(!)**

VERDICT: **While the lack of resolution options is disappointing, you can boost performance by dropping the draw distance and monkeying around with the dynamic grass options. The game happily plays at full draw distance on a 2GHz machine with 512Mb RAM and a GeForce 4, but anything under this and you'll have to scale back.**

Feisty

kicks off at sunrise, and you're asked to make a dawn strike on a small English outpost. Just as the sun peeks over the horizon, shadowed by your own squad of NPC soldiers, you tear into the outpost and butcher the troops garrisoned there. Your next task is to guard a nearby village from imminent attack, so you make a brisk run through the forest, picking off any soldiers you meet along the way. By the time you reach the village, the sun's high in the sky, but it's starting to cloud over. And just as you see 30 or 40 red dots appear on the mini-map, heralding the arrival of the English *en masse*, the wind whips up and it starts to rain. This sort of stuff really does add a lot to the way you feel about what you're doing, and from honeyed sunsets to bolts of fork-lightning piercing the gloom of night, there's definitely a good range of effects.

It all looks neat too, with some excellent character models and believable terrain. The massed battles are particularly impressive, especially when you're in the centre of a giant medieval scrum, swinging four feet of steel through torsos and tabards with utter abandon. And as you work through the missions, you find yourself in command of more and more troops. More importantly, you'll find a burgeoning selection of generals under your command. These characters can be ordered to follow or stay put, and will attack any enemies that come near. Alternatively, you can assume direct control of them and take them into battle. Like Joan, they gain new skills through experience, and frequently come with their own retinues of troops. With Joan and three generals under your command, each with 20 or more men in his retinue, the battle scenes can get absolutely *mental*.

Mass troop-management becomes a whole lot easier a few missions in, when the top-down RTS mode becomes available. It's pretty rudimentary though, with soggy controls and unresponsive unit selection, and it's frankly nowhere near as satisfying as getting stuck in with your chopper.

Joan pleases more than she annoys, but those faults *will* nibble at you like midges while you play. Don't expect technical wizardry, and you'll find merit herein.

AL BICKHAM

PCGA PROFILE

Joan of Arc is:
- **Intriguing**
- **Easy on the eye**
- **RPG, RTS and arcade slasher**

Joan of Arc is not:
- **Run-of-the-mill**
- **Without problems**
- **Technically sound**

■ Publisher **Enlight** ■ Developer **In-house** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, Radeon/GeForce 2**
■ Recommended **PIII 1.5GHz, 256Mb RAM, Radeon 8500/GeForce 3** ■ Multi-Player **None**
■ Web Address **www.joa-game.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

PC GAMES addict
Clunky and bitty, but a pleasing sword-slasher, with some neat RPG elements.
70%

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Severance
Hacky slashy third-person fun. Heavy emphasis on the severing of limbs.

Dungeon Siege
A huge and beautiful RPG that hides its statistic-fixation well.

GENRE: RACING

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

It still doesn't have the official WRC Citroen. But then, neither does Colin.

Bloody red tape, eh?

No wing MG ZR, no wing you, Colin McRae. Ah ha.

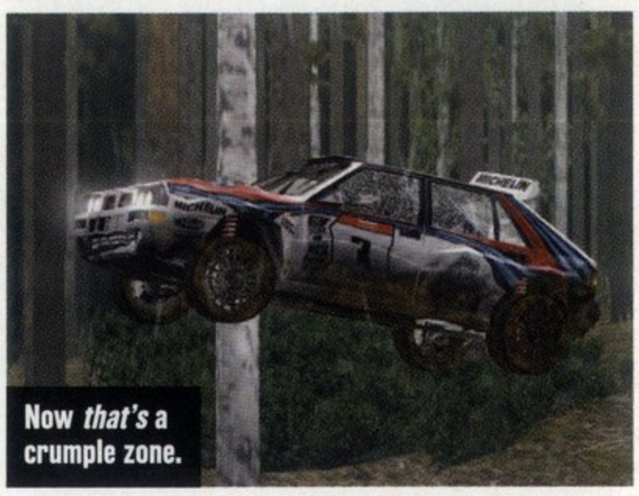
Group B cars – the real heart of this game.

SPIN ON THIS

Weaving soggily from tree to ditch? First, use a wheel. Second, visit the setup and do these things: reduce the colossal default dead zone to almost nil, especially if you hope to control a Peugeot 205 T16. Then shrink the saturation (how far you twiddle to achieve full lock) to reduce flail. Lastly, shrink the throttle deadzone but leave the travel long. Control! Mmm.

LIKE youth, *Colin McRae Rally* is beautiful but destined not to last. This is the best version of the best rally game, yet it's pinned on the cusp of domination and irrelevance. The problem is not so much what it does, but what it doesn't – time, both in gaming and rallying, is running on. And *CMR* has reached incarnation four by walking.

Real life has overtaken it. The chance for this sim-heavy title to bring wider authenticity disappeared long ago, when Sony locked out the rights to the World Rally Championship with its own PS2-based game. Then McRae defected to Citroen while the Focus-focused *CMR3* was on the shelves; *04* stars the French firm's Xsara at least, but only in look-alike colours. More problematically, Colin no longer drives this or any other WRC car. You wait: they'll bring out *CMR5* and he'll have a sex change and become a worryingly tactile greengrocer.



Now *that's* a crumple zone.

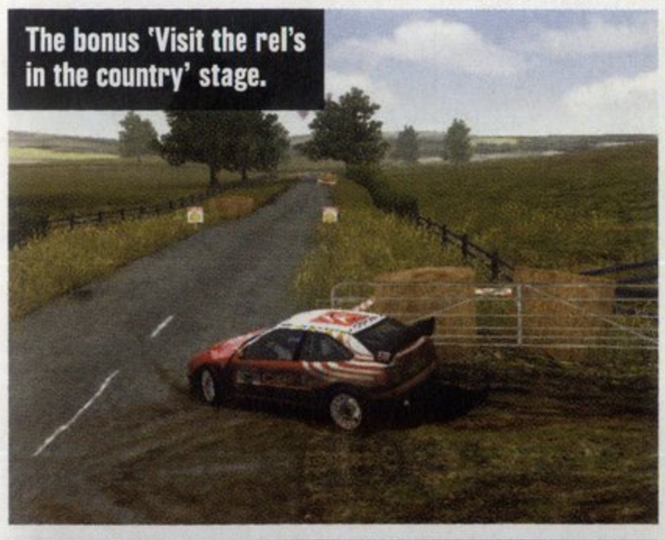
"Ringer's soft Scottish tones are insanely reassuring."

See the designers sobbing as they delete his half-done Paris-Dakar truck and start modelling potatoes with realistic physics instead. Oh, the tragedy.

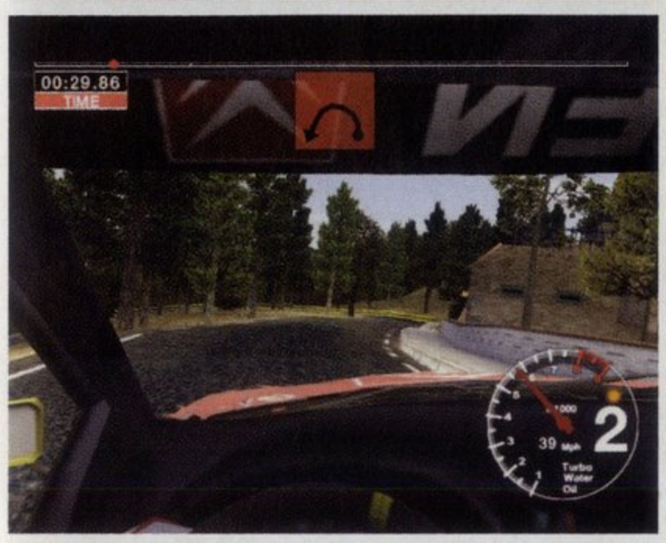
So dedicated followers of rallying may be put off. Even the more forgiving have at least two serious impediments. These are *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* and *Colin McRae Rally 3*. Yes, *04* is beauteous – and we'll begin the slobbering to justify that score shortly – but its predecessors are a) almost as good, b) almost the same and c) cheaper. Should you really spend *another* $79.95?

If you're old enough to have swooned for the grenade-like Group B cars of the '80s, the answer is yes. Granted, some have featured before, but the freshly opened-out structure now includes a Group B season among the six championships. The Focus obsession and its three-year plan is gone, replaced by the option to choose any car and (almost) any series from the start. You'll need to play the 4WD championship to unlock Group B and other sexy stuff, but the chance to actually campaign sensational – but previously badly supported – unlockables is an extra incentive.

Not that you'll need much prompting to drive the Xsara, Impreza, Lancer, 206 or (old-shape) Focus. Handling, while still identifiably *McRae*, has been significantly altered to let the car slide more realistically around its four tyres; it no longer rotates around a single, central point. The results are slower, subtler responses that are more satisfying than ever. Cars can now be set up for the next corner while still in the last – in fact, the older vehicles demand it, and this is really what it's all about. Aiding you here are throttle and brake responses that remain impeccably finely tuned, and with a wheel



The bonus 'Visit the rel's in the country' stage.

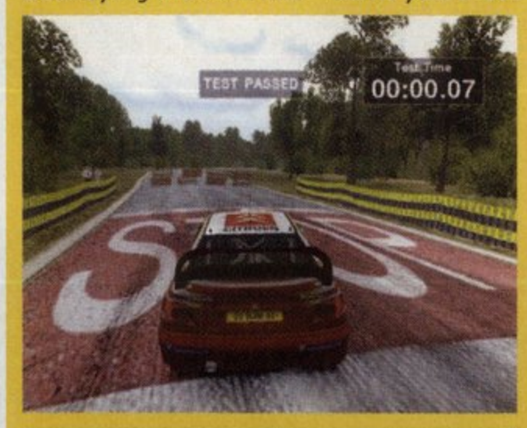


In-car Expert championship is for masochists only. The leather gimp suit is optional.

New stages, new danger. Same old countries.

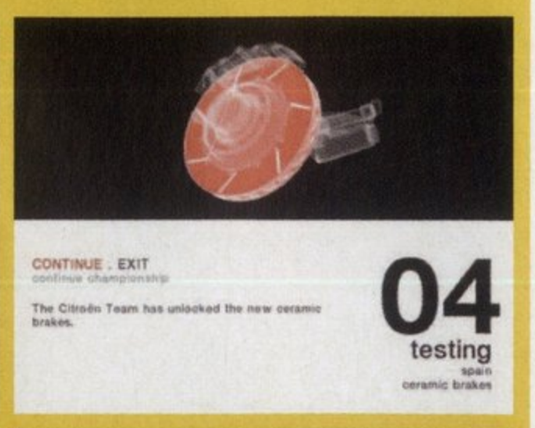
HAMMER COLIN'S PARTS

A driver's life is a busy one: now, between each rally, you go testing. Successfully completing the harshly timed tests – often by destroying the new bits – earns you those upgraded parts.



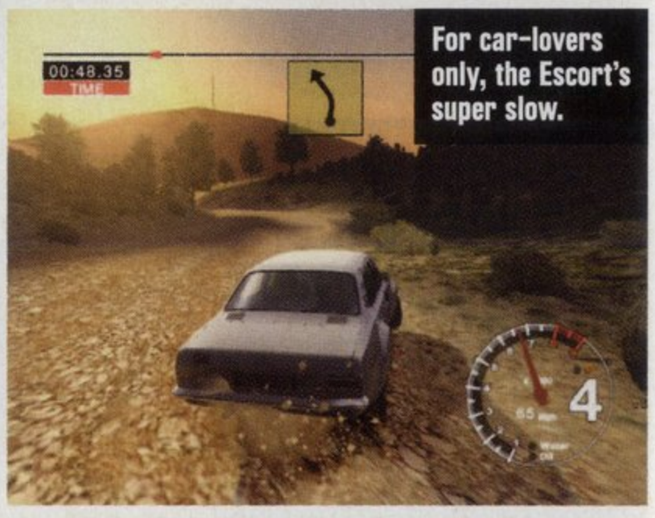
Smoke to a halt in the box from three increasingly high speeds. Where it says STOP. You'll know it when you see it.

This takes throttle control and a certain lack of mechanical sympathy – perhaps the toughest of a tough bunch.

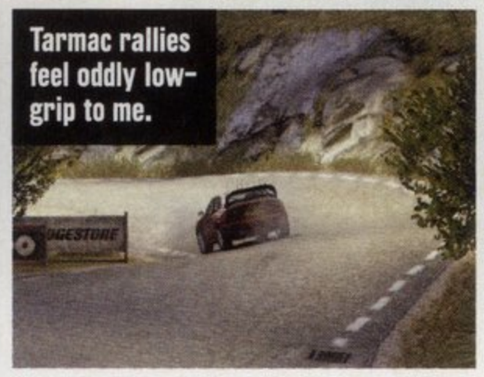


Hooray! Now we've got brakes made from old urinals. Is that good? Is it? But is it art? Hmm.

The bridge too far you've heard so much about.



For car-lovers only, the Escort's super slow.



Tarmac rallies feel oddly low-grip to me.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Colin McRae Rally 04* will play on your PC

■ Supported resolutions: **640x480 to 1600x1200** ■ Scaleable options: **Z-depth, texture quality, environment map, shadows**

VERDICT: It may be an evolution of an old engine, but *Colin McRae 04* has some long views and extreme detail on the cars. It mostly ran beautifully on our 2.2GHz/1Gb RAM/Radeon 9800XT PC at 1024x768, yet still slowed on Japan's leafy stages. At min spec you'll need to keep to 800x600 to get it running well – and the more RAM you have, the better.

Fourmost

the poise and control is unrivalled. Once acclimatised you can start *using* the car rather than merely reacting to what it and the road does.

Of course, this would be impossible if the pace notes were poor. They're not. They're brilliant. Before bunking off to Africa, McRae reinstated co-driver Derek Ringer. Nicky Grist might be more familiar, but it was Ringer who took the '95 title with McRae, and you can see why. You'd need a heart of stone not to find his soft Scottish tones insanely reassuring, and when he says 'turn' you want to tickle him under the chin (do you now? - *Ed*) and ruffle his hair. Calls are extremely detailed without being overwhelming, and their bespoke nature shows in telling edges of urgency, levity or even sarcasm in Ringer's delivery. Late notes or miscalls are rare – two or three in a season. This quality allied to such control makes *CMR04* incredibly satisfying. At its best, it suffuses your entire head with eye-vodka and leaks liquid happy into your heart. Mmm-hmm.

Damage is also more realistic. Plough the front into too many solid objects and the radiator starts blowing steam, leading to engine cut-outs (you should be able to restart it). Nice, but road signs and saplings don't bend at all, despite looking like the bushes and signs that do. Oh, and while we're griping, why no over-the-bonnet view? And the trumpeted online/LAN play for eight drivers: to be teenage about it, so what? You play simultaneously, but against ghost cars. These are just enough to put you off, but rarely enough to provide a real race – it's still you against the clock, still a solitary experience, from which you're now being distracted.

So *McRae* reaches the centre of youth's see-saw: on one side, beautiful graphics, superb notes, great handling and sexually arousing Group B driving. On the other, inconsistent obstacles, inauthentic modern cars, a confused brand and a small evolutionary step means that, to many, it quivers towards Yet Another Rally Game. It's brilliant but it can't go on. The irony, eh?

STEVE WILLIAMS

PCGA PROFILE

Colin McRae 4 is:

- **Polished**
- **Online**
- **Group B alicious**

Colin McRae 4 is not:

- **A radical departure**
- **WRC**
- **Likely to stop**

■ Publisher **Codemasters** ■ Developer **In-house** ■ Minimum System **PIII 750, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card**
■ Recommended **P4 1.4GHz, 512Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **Up to eight, Internet, LAN**
■ Web Address **www.codemasters/colinmcrae04** ■ Release Date **Late April**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Rally Championship
Ageing but still testing. Huge stages and great looks.

Colin McRae Rally 2.0.
Ageing but still worthwhile. Similar open structure to 04...

PC GAMES addict

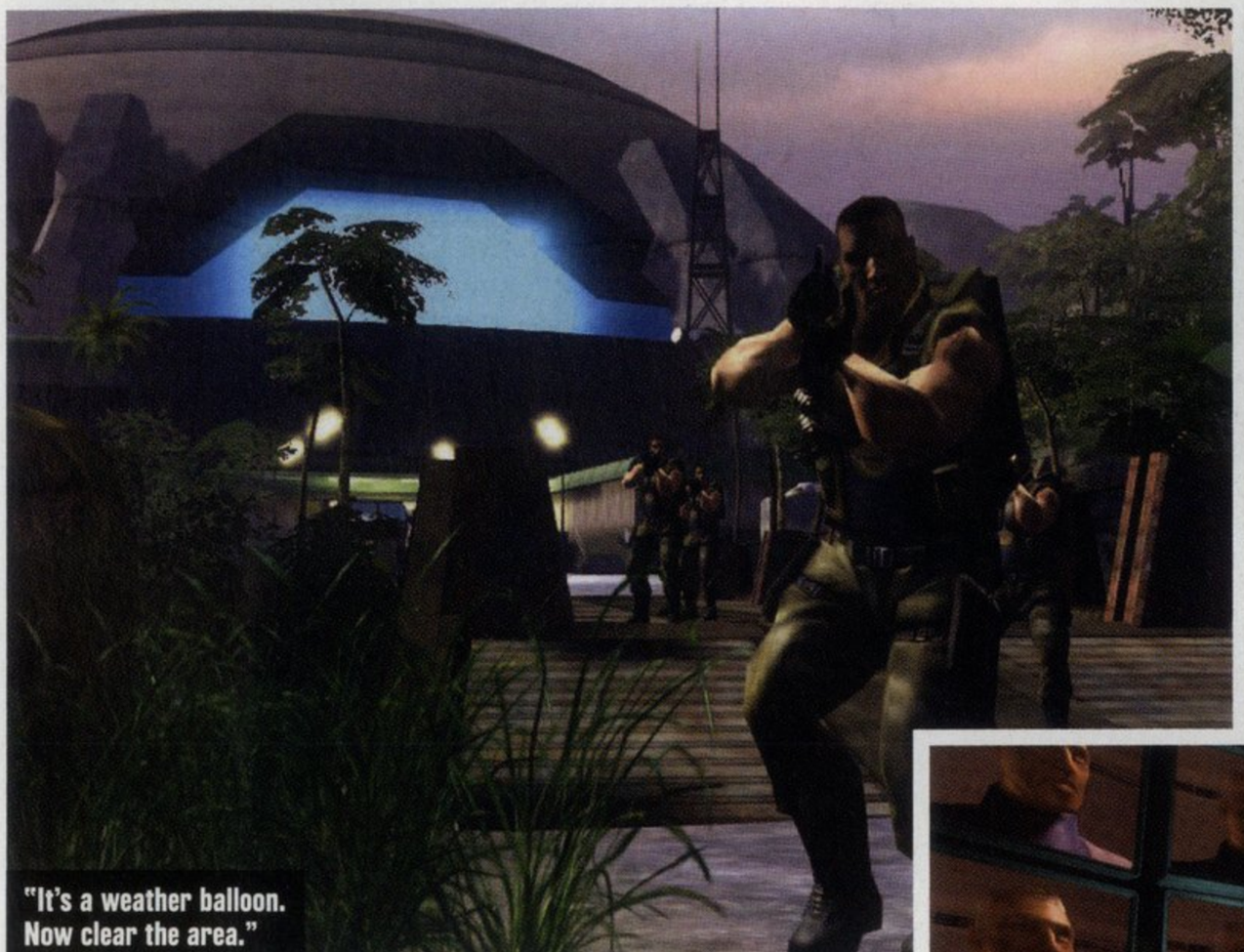
The definitive *McRae*. More choice, great handling and notes. But where next?

91%

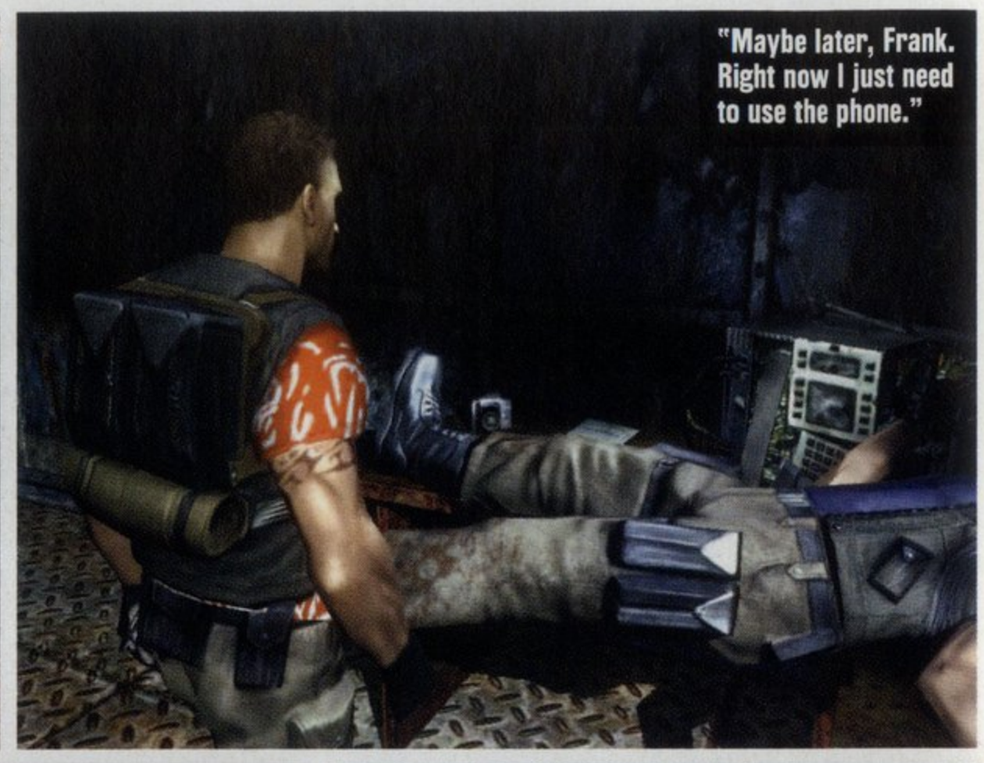
GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

FAR CRY

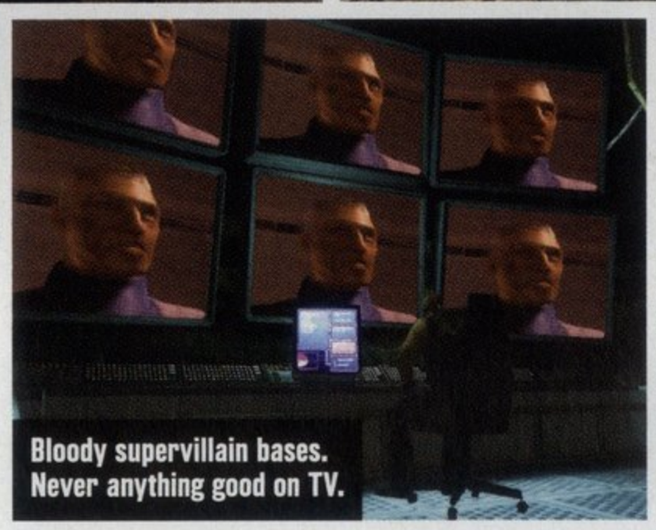
Hell comes to Paradise. Well, everyone needs a holiday now and again.



"It's a weather balloon. Now clear the area."



"Maybe later, Frank. Right now I just need to use the phone."



Bloody supervillain bases. Never anything good on TV.

Night-vision – ideal for spotting patrolling guards.

SIZE does matter, graphics aren't simply the thing you throw in when twittering "but it's the gameplay that counts", and the world of action movies would have been immeasurably improved had Steven Seagal taken a long walk off a short battleship. **The last point isn't especially relevant, apart from the fact that *Far Cry*'s hero couldn't be closer to the gravelly voiced goon's ex-Special Forces characters if he tried. The first two however are absolutely crucial to understanding what makes *Far Cry* such a captivating game, and you need only glance at the screenshots on these pages to understand why.**

It's beautiful. Stunning, even. You start the good fight in a series of dark, damp caves, but this is simply a trick to get you off-guard before throwing open the gate to a pixel-perfect panorama of sandy islands, gently fluttering vegetation, majestic rolling oceans and verdant forestry. Enter one of the many buildings or bunkers scattered around, and you find yourself in a dark, near photo-realistic world, with flickering neon casting dynamic shadows through the soft-lit blooms, intricately textured walls glimmering in the light of a blazing gun. *Far Cry* isn't the first game to mix and match its combat arenas like this – we've already seen the pretty but ultimately disappointing *Chrome*, not to mention the real-world likes of *Delta Force* and *Operation Flashpoint*, but none have pulled it off with anything like as much panache.

"Far Cry's beauty is not just skin-deep."

Far Cry's beauty, however, is not just skin-deep. A thousand little nips and tucks make at least the external environments really come alive, from the way that trees shudder at a grenade's concussive blast to the animation of the evil mercs who provide most of your opposition early on. With the assistance of a pair of binoculars, you can not only zoom in on them, but overhear conversations from the other side of the map. In an inspired twist, every enemy in the game has an implanted tag in their body. Sweep an area with the binoculars and they get added to your radar display, making it easy to sneak up on them in the foliage and catch them unawares. Become cocky and start focusing only on the little coloured blips on your panel, and it's easy to be caught off-guard by a hail of assault-gun fire.

Unfortunately, the system isn't quite perfect, and even with plenty of planning, full health and armour, it's very easy to find yourself hitting the dirt. Mounted guns cut through you like a hot bullet through Benecol, enemies with rocket launchers guarantee a very, very bad hair day, and at times it seems that you can spill their metaphorical pint just by looking at them in a funny way. Amusingly, *Far Cry* gives itself a slight get-out clause for this: lead character Jack Carver spends the game wearing a bright red shirt. But it can lead to frustration. Once triggered, it's not hard for groups to track you down – spraying gunfire for miles and quickly moving in on even your stealthiest hidey-hole.

Mutants. Your sign of FPS quality.

Spy on enemies with binoculars that also enhance your hearing.

ISLANDS ALIVE

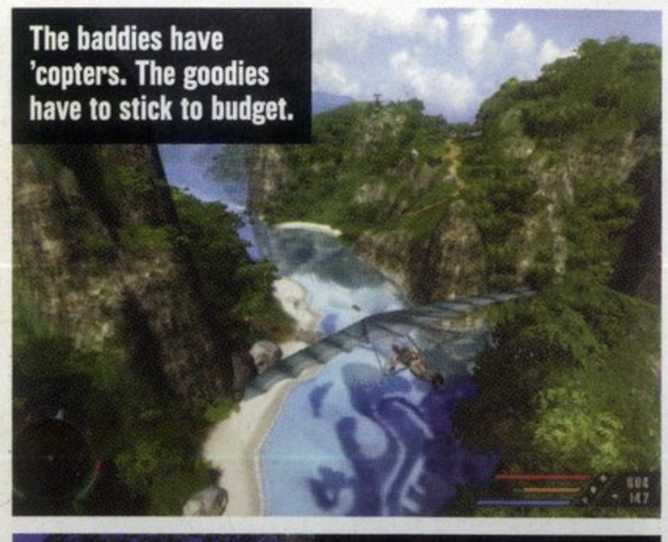
Actual work ground to a halt at Derwent Howard Publishing for a few days as we tested out *Far Cry*'s fairly standard selection of game modes. There's standard and team-based deathmatch on a number of custom built maps, plus the option to create your own with the bundled Sandbox editor. *Far Cry* is clearly intended to be heavily modded after release, and we should be seeing some interesting stuff. Like jetpacks. We want jetpacks. Get working on it, all you clever programmer types... now!

YES, VERY FUNNY...

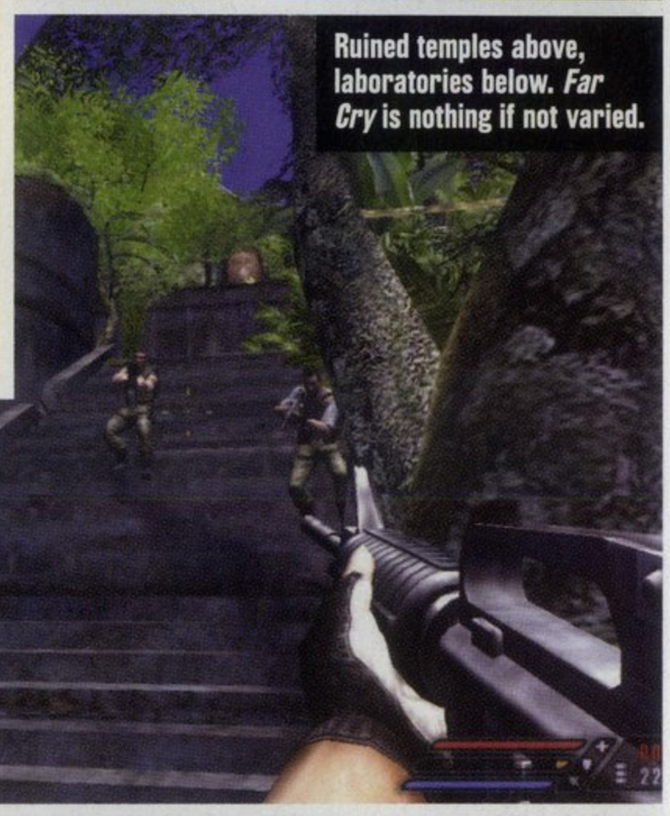
Meet Doyle, who offers you advice and mission objectives throughout your adventure. He's also possessed with a slightly sick sense of humour, at least, so it seems...

"Get into this carrier," he says, "There's a hole in the side." And an obvious one, really – but is there a way up and into it? Nope.

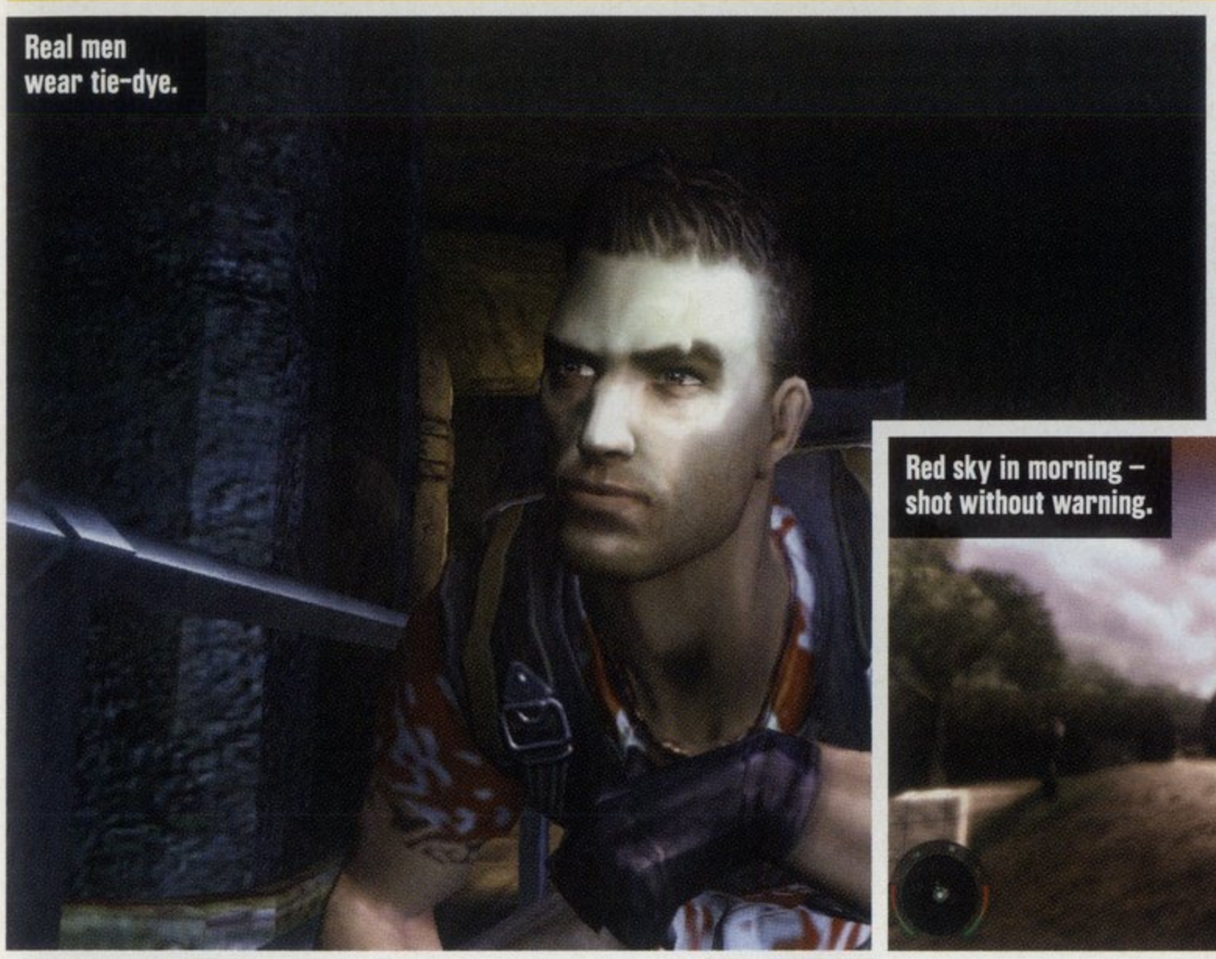
After stealing a patrol boat, we come across this. Ha, ha, Doyle. If you get yourself kidnapped, you're staying 'napped.



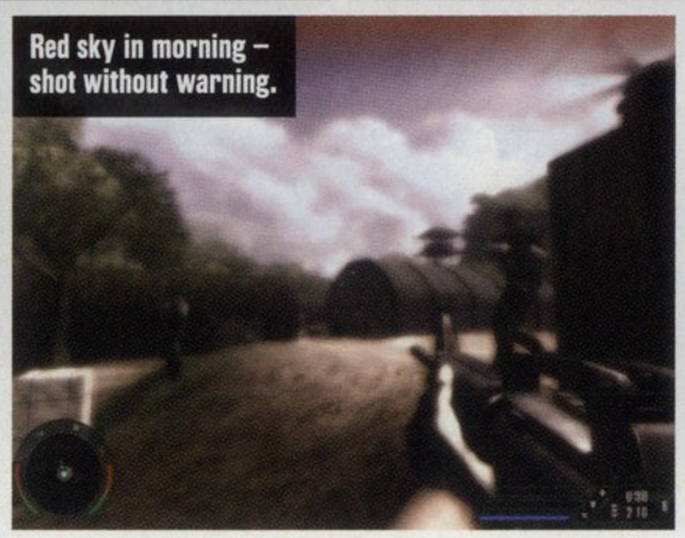
The baddies have 'copters. The goodies have to stick to budget.



Ruined temples above, laboratories below. *Far Cry* is nothing if not varied.



Real men wear tie-dye.



Red sky in morning – shot without warning.

Not trying to upstage *Doom 3*. Not a bit of it. Not at all.

Scenic

The rest of the time, you've still got major problems – but luckily, that's because the AI is generally excellent. Enemies nip in and out of foliage, using natural cover to get at you instead of just charging with guns blazing. They run to grab their friends, make use of grenades to flush you out and hop into any nearby vehicles or gun emplacements to turn the tide in their favour. They even use psychological warfare, creasing you up with laughter by yelling "I'm going to shoot you! In the face!" mid-combat. At least, I assume it's that, rather than just a bad script, because what are the chances of that happening? Nevertheless, all the audio barks, overheard conversations, little character animations and explosive set-pieces (although not *Call of Duty* quality by a long shot) give *Far Cry* a genuine sense of life from start to finish.

Despite the wide-open environments, you're led more or less by the nose throughout the levels. The difference between this and *Chrome* or *Halo* is that you really don't notice, or care. There are always alternative ways of approaching a battle, from charging straight in guns blazing to hiding from patrols in the forests, or taking over gun-towers outright and dispatching everything in sight with a flick of the mouse. You're always in the thick of the action, and always feel in control. A few vehicles, including a rocket-toting patrol

"You don't notice you're being led by the nose."

boat, a Jeep and a 4x4, offer an excellent change of pace – although usually on fixed, linear paths between mission objectives (*Yes, we call those 'roads'* – Ed) rather than *Halo*'s more direct combat sequences.

While driving can be fun, the appearance of a new vehicle on the horizon usually means trouble, with patrol boats hurling rockets into your face, or pin-point precision required to shoot the drivers before they can run into you. On the plus side, it makes for some very satisfying head-shots – straight through the windscreen if necessary.

Mastering your arsenal is the key to success. Every weapon has its uses, and you can only carry five of them at any one time. The machete is good for silent takedowns, or the pistol for short-to-medium distance head-shottery. Assault rifles and sub-machineguns offer different balances of dealt damage and burst length, good for general suppressing fire and tearing apart enemies up close and personal. Knowing when an enemy is within range to kill you, and when you can happily blitz your way towards him with no ill-effect bar a few more macho-looking scars, is crucial.

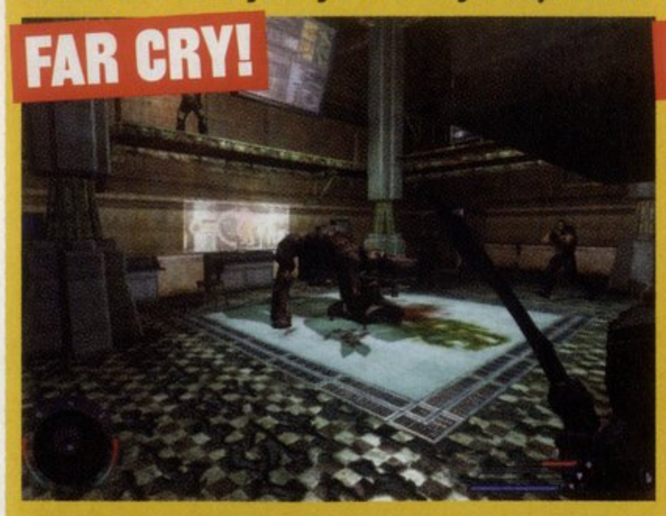
Ironically, one fantastic tweak to the combat comes from the lack continued over

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

While *Far Cry* has you avoiding enemies in the usual way (stay out of eye-shot, don't start playing loud oompah music behind their backs, head-shots are dead giveaways, etc.), it also offers an unusual 'detection' meter system. This gauge fills up the closer you are to being detected, giving you a few seconds to dive to the ground or nip behind a corner. Be careful though, the AI is trigger-happy even on the easier difficulty levels.

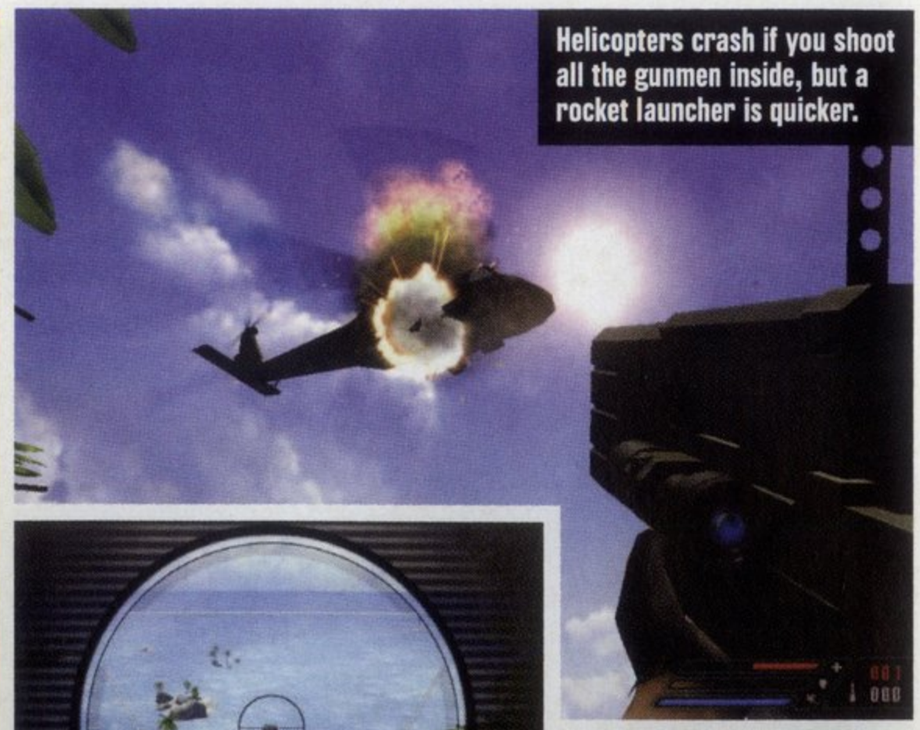
LETTERS FROM THE ID

Pardon us if we're getting this feeling of déjà-vu... of déjà-vu... of déjà-vu...

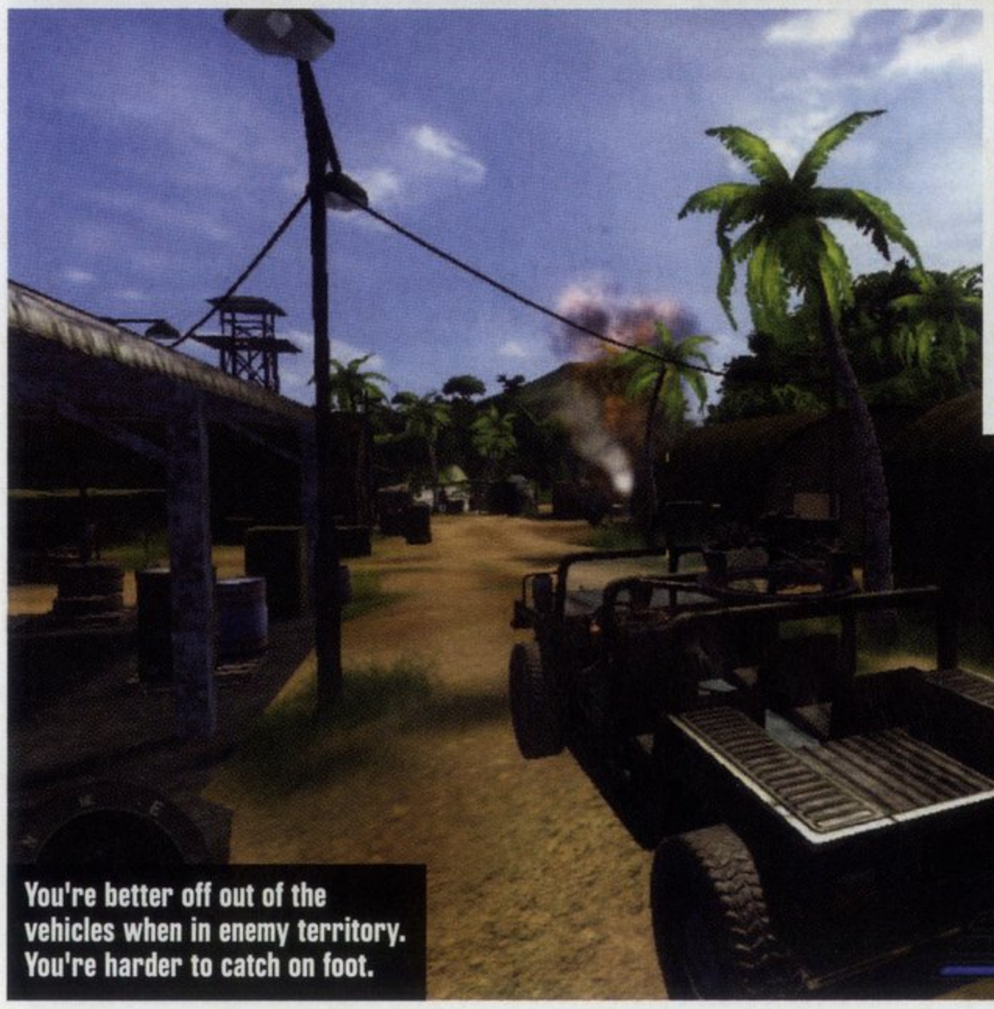


Far Cry's interior rendering system looks similar to the *Doom 3* promo shots and leaked alphas that of course none of us have seen, oh no, not at all – from the stencil look to swinging lights. Beautiful though.

And then there are the monsters. The mutated apes you meet first are dead-ringers for *Quake*'s Fiend here, right down to their tendency to leap straight past you if you've the bad manners to side-step.



Helicopters crash if you shoot all the gunmen inside, but a rocket launcher is quicker.



You're better off out of the vehicles when in enemy territory. You're harder to catch on foot.

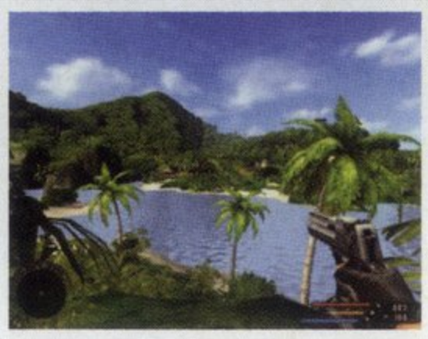
It can be hard to spot the enemies in the jungle... or these images.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Far Cry* will play on *your* PC

- Supported resolutions: **720x576 to system max**
- Scaleable options: **Texture/filter/anisotropic rendering quality...**

VERDICT: To see *Far Cry* at its best, you'll need a powerful PC – about 3GHz or so with a decent graphics card. That said, even with everything switched off it still looks excellent. The textures become a bit blurry and you lose a few nice details like translucent water, but it's perfectly playable and efficient. You still get the huge landscapes, with no fogging or other difficulties.



PCGA PROFILE

Far Cry is:
- **Glorious**
- **Big**
- **Frustrating**

Far Cry is not:
- **Easy to master**
- **For old computers**
- **For agoraphobics either**

of saves. Instead, you get a checkpoint system on each level. It's not quite as well balanced as *Halo*'s, with a single troublesome sniper or hidden goon often making you replay and replay lengthy battles until you're ready to chuck your PC into the salty sea, but there are compensations. Unlike just about every other checkpoint-based game in history, *Far Cry* never screws you over for losing too much health. Cross the save boundary on the cusp of death and when you reload, you'll find that you've been given a quick boost to help you live long enough to find some body armour or a medical pack. Still stuck? Nip back to the previous save.

Far Cry doesn't overwrite saves, making it easy to hop back a few minutes to redo and continue from the specific fight that caused you problems, rather than having to replay the whole level. And while dying never ceases to be a pain, at least loading saved games from the same level is nice and fast.

"One of the best shooters ever seen on the PC."

Does all this sound familiar? If you're thinking of a little Xbox game that goes by the name of *Halo*, give yourself a coconut. Multiple coconuts, even. *Far Cry* is what *Halo* could have been had it continued to be a PC game – markedly more in-depth, more serious and more freeform, and sadly, a touch more frustrating on occasion, but the similarities far outweigh the differences. It's just annoying that this extends to the storyline, the battle against the face-shooting mercenaries slowly dripping away in the most generic of plot twists. If we were going to splash out a bazillion dollars on creating an engine like this and a game of this quality, we'd be tempted to give the story just a little more effort than the few bucks required to rent The Island of Doctor Moreau. Still, if if that's the price you've got to pay for one of the best shooters ever seen on the PC, so be it.

Well, that and a few grand for a system that'll run it with all the snazzy graphics switched on. But you knew that already, didn't you?

RICHARD COBBETT

- Publisher **Ubi Soft** ■ Developer **Crytek** ■ Minimum System PIII **1GHz, 256Mb RAM, 4Gb HD, 64Mb 3D card**
- Recommended **P4 3Ghz, 1Gb RAM, 128Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN/Internet, up to 16 players**
- Web Address **www.farcry-thegame.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Halo
The Xbox crutch returns to PC in an excellent conversion. Pure brilliance.

Operation Flashpoint
A more military take on the freeform action gig and with more depth to the fighting.

PC GAMES addict

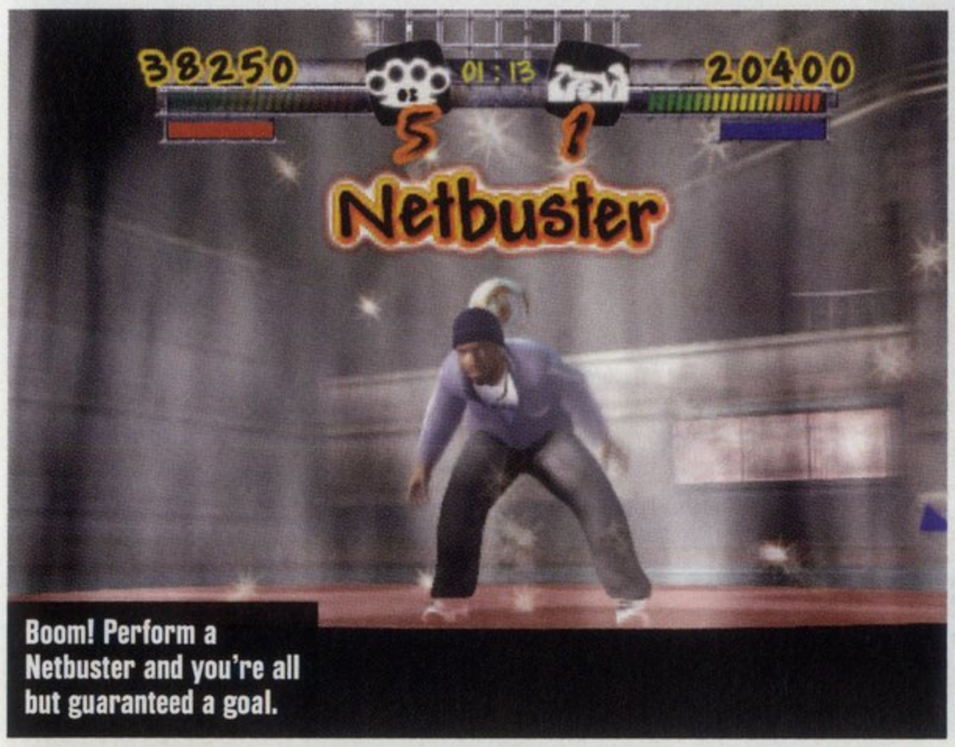
Stunningly beautiful, if occasionally frustrating. Shed a tear for your old PC and fire up the future.

91%

GENRE: SPORTS

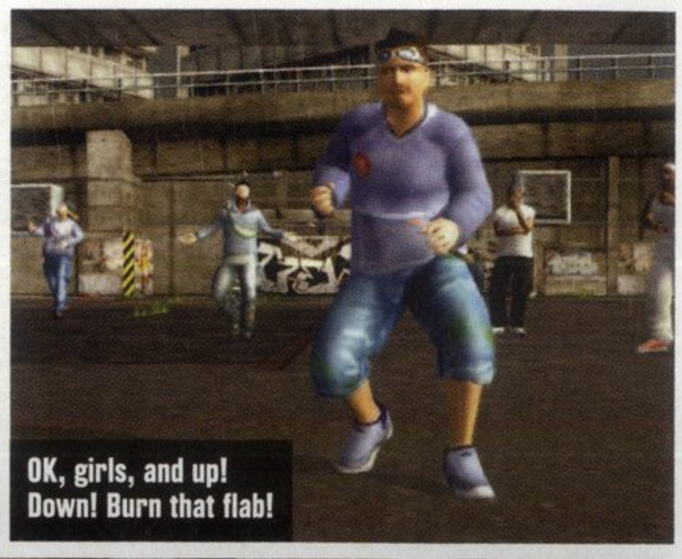
URBAN FREESTYLE SOCCER

Funky like Wagner, man. Wikki-wikki-wicker chair. Or whatever. Damn kids.



Boom! Perform a Netbuster and you're all but guaranteed a goal.

A triumph for physics engines, as the ball gets stuck on the scenery.


OK, girls, and up! Down! Burn that flab!

HIT IT

This comes with a licensed track for each team. Looking for your favourite? You get La Raza, Go With The Flow, Raise Up, OohWee (too easy...), Champion, Perfect World, Come Back Around, War and Girl Talk. Why couldn't there be one gang who liked, say, jazz? A little Mack The Knife at half-time, perhaps, to replace my Sinatra-esque cries of "Make it stop, make it stop, make it stop!"

PCGA PROFILE

Urban Soccer is:
- **Silly**
- **Limited**
- ***Brakin II: Electric Boogaloo***

Urban Soccer is not:
- **Hip**
- **Groovy**
- **Funky**

BITCHES. **Only a couple of easy syllables, seven taps of a key or half a brain cell required. Not a hard word at all. Stupid and childish? Yes. Hard? No. So what can we make of this literary gem, taken straight from the *Urban Freestyle Soccer* manual:**

"Shakedown are gangstas from the West-side of the city and are tough and rough and always ready for a brawl and the last thing they want to do is get 'dissed' in front of their B**CHES."

Whatever could they mean? Why would the beaches, the birches, the benches or the belches be offended? Vowel, please, Sophie. And perhaps a nice padded cell for whichever genius decided that a load of grunge-obsessed sk8ter-bois called Giles, Chris and Simon could be, like, the most rockingest thing *ever*.

We'd better get on with this review before the stars' mothers turn up to complain that their dinner's getting cold. Aside from being quite spectacularly un-funky, *Urban Freestyle Soccer* isn't too cool. The main draw is shrinking down the playing field to a variety of indoor arenas (mostly rectangular, but with a few interactive background elements to play with), cutting the teams down to four a side and throwing in a few special moves for kicks. Such as kicks. And rams and punches and slides. With no referee, you can steal the ball with a spiked attack, bounce it off scenery and power it into the goal with an explosive 'Netbuster' – although *Speedball 2*'s brutal legend is in no danger of being usurped. In terms of raw, physical violence, *UFS* never gets heavier than a playground fracas with a teacher nearby to break things up before anyone is hurt (or entertained).

"In most cases, these balls have yet to drop."

Annoyingly, there's no multi-player mode, which is frankly madness in a game like this, but there are several unlockable game modes to play – from straight matches to 'Freestyle' bouts of showing off and the 'Turf Wars', which challenge you to kick balls about the whole city. Sadly, in most cases it's pretty clear that they've yet to drop.

Vanilla

Any attitude – oops, sorry – 'tood', is drained straight out of things by the awful voice acting and the often surreal cartwheels, backslaps and breakdancing routines that everyone pulls after scoring a goal. After listening to your team's favourite piece of music again and again, for half of every single match that you play, you'll be ready to smash your speakers with a sledgehammer... to the extreme! Coupled with the excruciating voiceovers and inadvertent humour, like the two separate times a player managed to get the ball trapped on the scenery, it all comes across as being about as street-smart as Big Bird, Elmo, Bert and Ernie.

Urban Freestyle is silly, but not funny – the action OK, but no competition for a proper football game. Playable enough in the short term, there's little to convince you to keep going – and it's little more than a comedy flicker next to supernovas like *Jet Set Radio* and *Grand Theft Auto*. At least there's a game at its heart, unlike many extreme sport titles, but will you have game for it? Not hardly, bro.

RICHARD COBBETT

■ Publisher **Acclaim** ■ Developer **Gusto Games** ■ Minimum System **PIII 500, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card**
■ Recommended **Pentium 1GHz** ■ Multi-Player **None**
■ Web Address **www.acclaim.com/games/ freestylesoccer** ■ Release Date **Out now**

PC GAMES addict
Cool as fire, man. Which isn't very cool at all, come to think of it. Hmm.
46%

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
Little to do with soccer, but definitely the entertaining urban experience to indulge in.

Pro Evolution Soccer
An actual game of football, with all the depth that you expect and deserve.

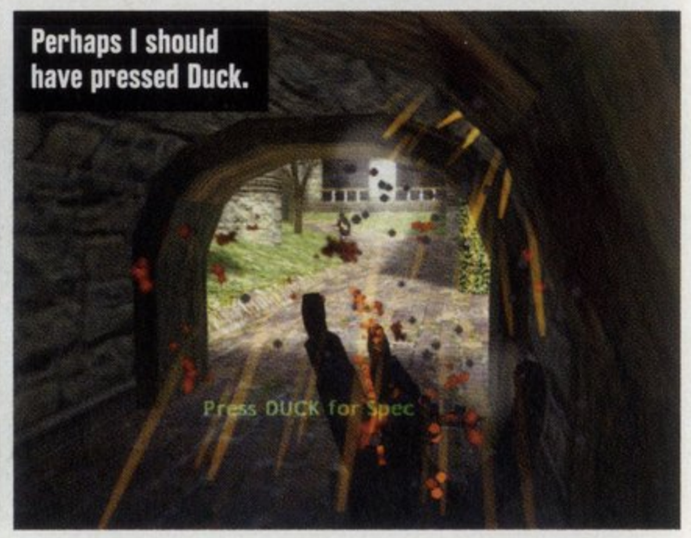
GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

COUNTER-STRIKE CONDITION ZERO

No, your eyes aren't deceiving you. It's *CZ* review number two.

Buy items as quickly as possible to steal a march on your opponents.

The machinegun is powerful, but so heavy that it slows you down considerably.



Perhaps I should have pressed Duck.

IT'S fitting, in a way, that Valve and friends have had a second crack at *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* – the single-player version of everyone's favourite team shooter. After all, the original multi-player phenomenon was years in both the making and the tweaking. So why should the single-player version be any different?

This is the final *final* version, apparently. You'll remember that we put the first version of the *CS:CZ* review code to the test in PCGA 15, awarding it 65%. And although some magazines were keen to excuse its obvious faults, we were clearly the only periodical to call it correctly. Why else would Valve have decided to overhaul the whole game, relegating the sub-standard mission-based experience (the subject of the original review) to a bonus section called 'Deleted Scenes'? Talk about admitting defeat.

For the purposes of this review, then, forget everything you know or thought you knew about *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*. The bottom line is that in its present form (and who's to say it won't change *again* before release?) this

"Forget everything you thought you knew."

is literally a single-player version of *Counter-Strike*, with both your team-mates and opponents existing as cleverly-coded AI bots.

Tackled by the talented Turtle Rock Studios, it's the invention of the Official *Counter-Strike* bot that makes this game possible. Furthermore, it's the quality of the bots that makes it supremely playable. As many FPS developers have discovered, it's notoriously difficult to achieve human-like behaviour in AI-controlled players (including, as it has to, the potential for camping and sheer stupidity as well as the obvious requirements for skilled play). But with this official bot, Turtle Rock have pretty much nailed it.

'Pretty much', because there are still a few rare inconsistencies and oddities about the bots' behaviour – particularly at the medium skill setting. Witnessed examples include an enemy running straight past me in a tight corridor of 'Prodigy'; close enough to have to move out of the way to avoid me, but never once opening fire. Plus, it's an all-too regular occurrence to see terrorist and counter-terrorist stumble into one another – only for both parties to pause for a full second (presumably while the AIs calculate exactly what they should do) before the shooting starts.

Still, there's a lot for these bots to remember in their tiny little minds, what with concocting strategies for bomb-planting, hostage guarding and camping choke points. And at these tasks, they excel. You really can drift off into that paranoid *Counter-Strike* state of mind that sees you crawling around a level trying to second-guess terrorist positions as if they were human.

The atmosphere is helped along by ostensibly intelligent chatter from your fellow counter-terrorists. As well as coming out with useful statements of

AGEING DISGRACEFULLY

There's no getting away from it – *Counter-Strike*'s graphics are looking dated these days, and even the much-hyped improved character models and weapons don't do much to improve the situation. Not only that, but the lack of a sophisticated physics system means you still get dreadful clipping problems, with dead guys regularly falling through walls. It's not the end of the world, but after such a long gestation, we expected more.

Now *that's* a knife.

WHO GIVES YOU EXTRA? WHO? WHO? VALVE DO!

Following the trend for DVD extras, the 'Deleted Scenes' section of the game features the whole of the original single-player mission-based *CS:CZ*. A game that was tackled by both Gearbox and Ritual, it's a linear affair that suffers from a distinct lack of imagination and feels hopelessly dated by today's standards. Far better to play the 'Custom' game which lets you set up your bot-based encounters on any map.

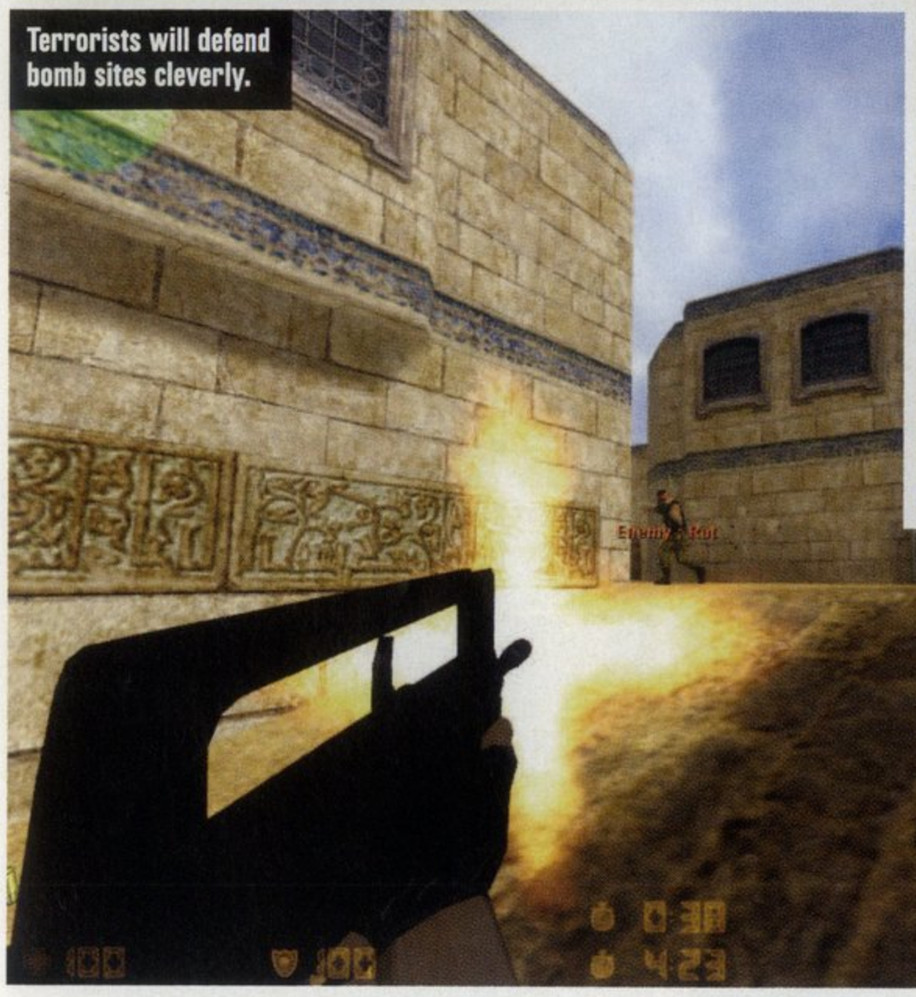
From here, you pick your map, number of bots, and any other limitations you want to impose on the game.

Pick a side and an outfit. Look familiar now? It's the *Counter-Strike* you know and love.

... just without 'meh's, 'n00b5' and 'haxOr's littering the airwaves. Which is no bad thing as far as we're concerned.

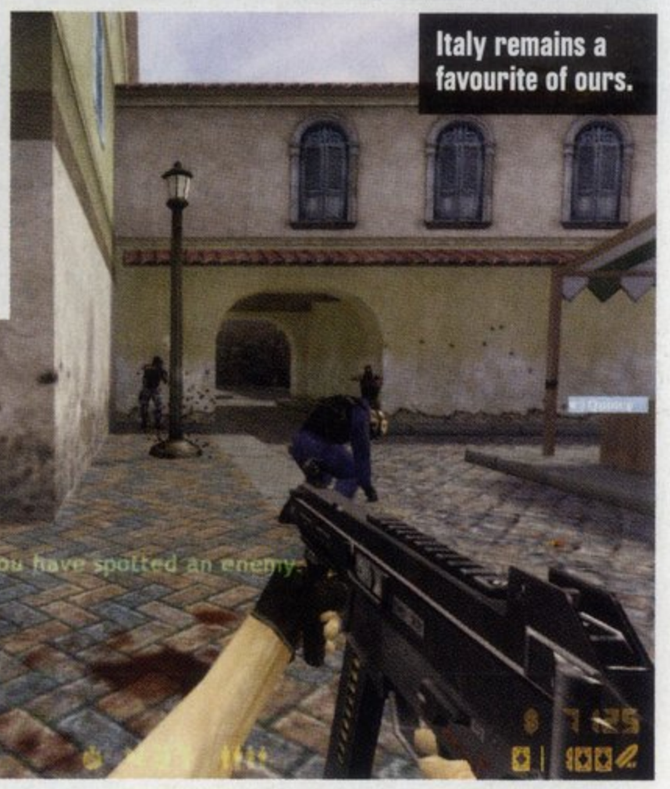
Reloading's best done behind cover.

Cut-scenes punctuate the single-player game.



Terrorists will defend bomb sites cleverly.

The single-player game. Poor.



Italy remains a favourite of ours.

Déjà-revu

intent ("I'm going to camp bomb-site 'A'") and even more useful progress reports ("The bomb's been planted at 'B'"), they'll also respond positively or negatively to your orders. These are chosen via a numbered menu and remain identical to those found in the current online *CS*. Requests for them to 'Stick Together' or 'Follow Me' can therefore be made, but whether they're adhered to or wilfully ignored by your select troops remains a product of their statistics.

This all-too-human element of uncertainty contributes much to *Condition Zero*. By injecting the possibility of misbehaviour into the proceedings, Turtle Rock have ensured that insecurity haunts your every movement. Without being able to predict your own team's actions, you feel exposed and vulnerable. It's undoubtedly been a difficult balance for the developers to get right, but to be over-critical would be churlish. These AI team-mates can be stupidly brave as well as brazenly stupid. Just like the PCGA crew, and just like every other *Counter-Strike* player I've ever played against.

Sadly, the game's structure struggles to live up to the excellence of the bots. The 18 levels are split up between six 'Tours of Duty' – each of which provides three well-known maps with their own specific goals. In Italy, for instance, you'll be tasked with leading by a clear two

"The AI can be stupidly brave or brazenly stupid."

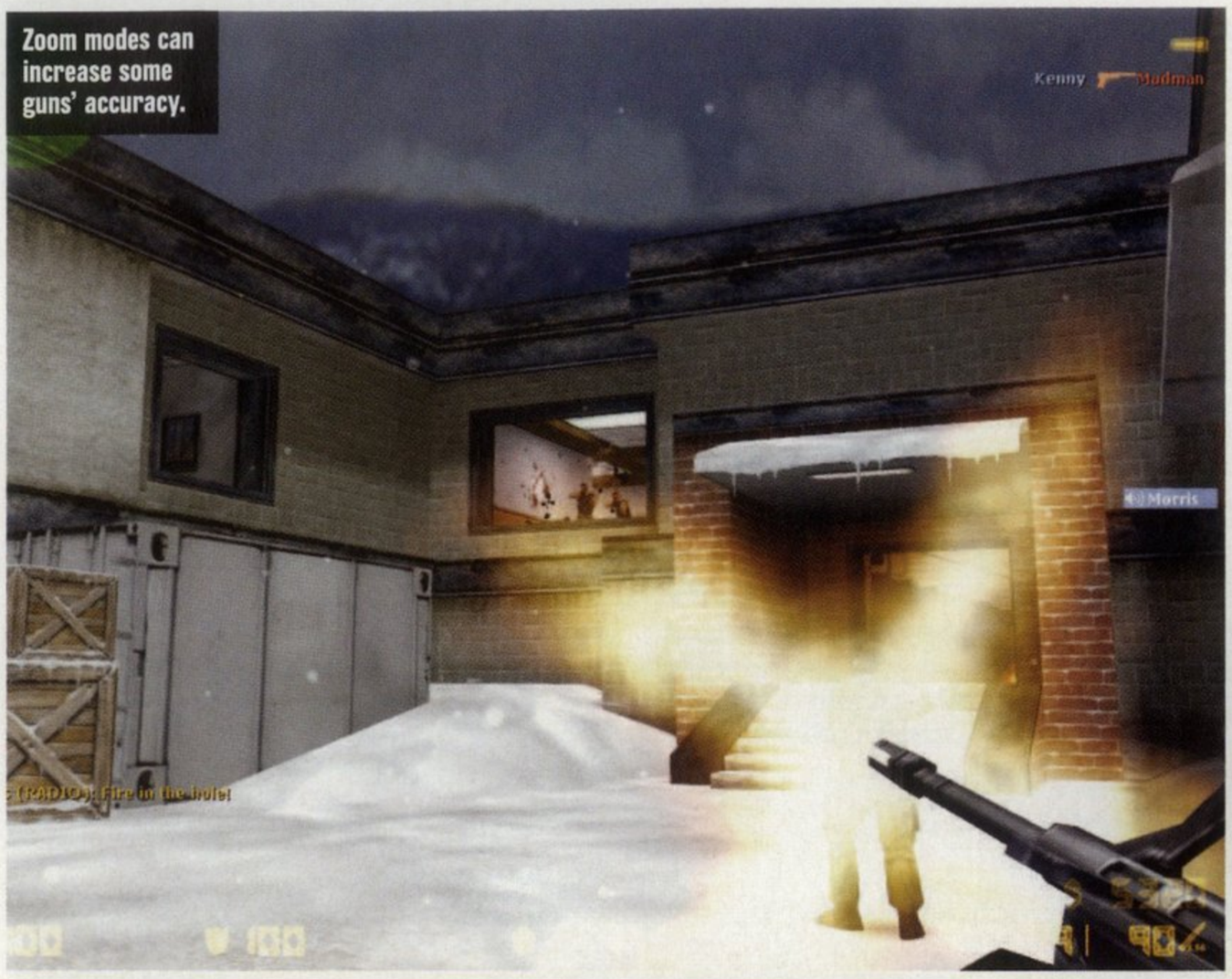
rounds during the match, as well as killing six terrorists yourself, wasting one with a sniper rifle, and rescuing four hostages. Should the terrorists get a clear two rounds ahead at any point, or the main match timer run out before all your objectives are complete, it's game over... albeit only to replay the match straight away. Aside from that, it's pretty much *Counter-Strike* as we know it.

Many *CS* staples remain the same. The Buy menu, weapons and items will mostly be familiar, as will most of the level design, including the unreal, movie-set look of the scenery (although some levels have been tweaked, weather effects added, and textures in particular look better than ever, if still a little outmoded in the *Doom 3/Half-Life 2* scheme of things).

Once all Tours of Duty are completed, all that remains is either to replay them on harder skill settings (and 'expert' really is monstrously difficult), or else move on to those aforementioned 'Deleted Scenes'. If you've got issue 15, flick to page 68 for the full low-down on what the original mission-based single-player element consists of. To save you the trouble though, it's sub-standard continued over

MAKE FRIENDS AND INJURE PEOPLE

Before going into any battle, you'll need to assemble your team. You earn arbitrary 'points' by completing levels, which can be spent on more experienced team-mates. Stats governing their performance include the fairly generic categories of 'Skill', 'Co-op' and 'Bravery'. Of more use is the graphic indicating their weapon preference. You probably don't want a shotgun specialist, for instance, on an open map that favours snipers.



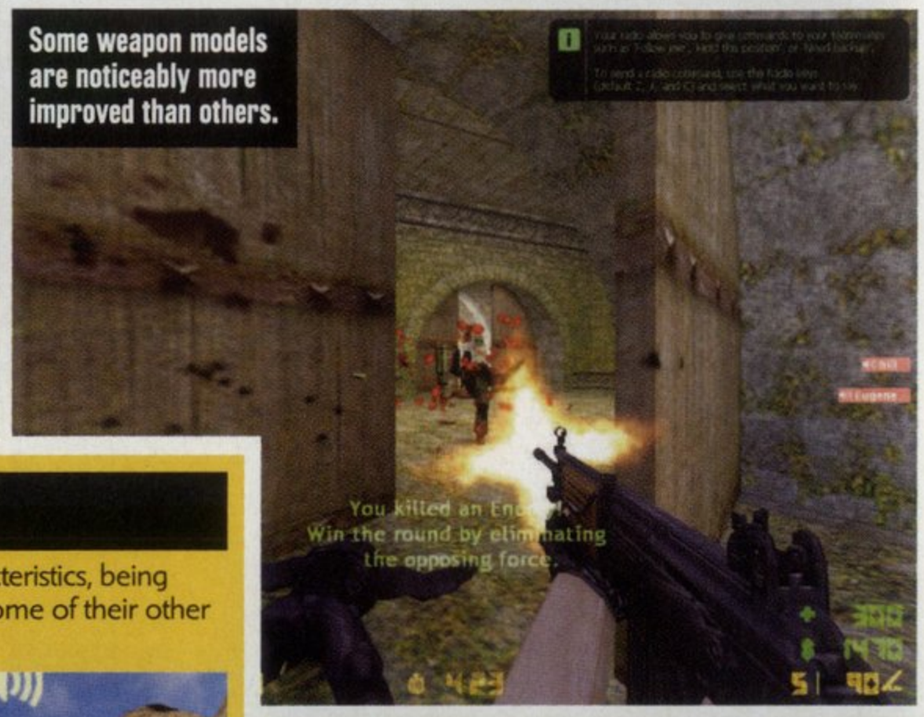
Zoom modes can increase some guns' accuracy.

SYSTEM MISER

How *Counter-Strike: CZ* will play on *your* PC

- Supported resolutions: **640x480 up to 1600x1200**
- Scaleable options: **Texture detail, 16/32bit colour, OpenGL/D3D renderer, sound quality**

VERDICT: **Based on such old tech, *CS:CZ* won't provide any relatively recent PC with any problems. If it does, you can have a perfectly acceptable game at 640x480 – after all, it's not as if it starts looking like *Half-Life 2* at higher res. If it does get choppy, sound quality should be your first port of call then you could always take the textures down. Uuuugly.**



Some weapon models are noticeably more improved than others.

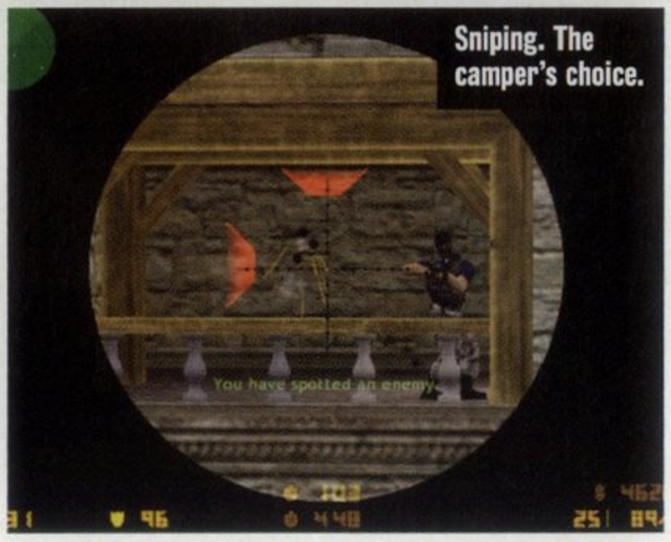
AM I BOT OR NOT?

By far the most compelling reason to play *CZ* is its bots; at times they display spookily accurate human characteristics, being both spineless campers and lunatic point-men in equal measure. As well as covering you (and each other), some of their other notable skills include these.

Your CT mates will use bombs cleverly – even as far as using smoke grenades to cover areas of vulnerability.

Even complex routes that require some fiddly jumping present no problem to the acrobatic bots.

That icon appears when the named team member is giving you audible info about terrorist positions.



PCGA PROFILE

CS:CZ is:
- **Single-player *CS*, literally**
- **Blessed with brilliant bots**
- **Looking dated**

CS:CZ is not:
- **A revolution for *CS***
- **As good as playing with humans**
- ***So* good they made it twice**

Soldier of Fortune II fare: linear missions, thinly-scripted sequences, repetitive blasting action. Nothing to get too excited about.

Of course, true multi-player remains the highlight of any *Counter-Strike* release, and *Condition Zero* lets you use the official bot to make up the numbers on either counter-terrorist or terrorist sides. By selecting the 'Custom Game' option, you can quickly and easily set up matches on any map with as many or as few AI protagonists as you like. It's good, flexible stuff. Regardless of the bots' superior AI, though, the magic's not entirely there since it's obviously not the same as playing against human opponents. (On the plus side, at least you're safe from the cheating, relentless profanity and lag which haunts some servers).

Like Vegemite then, *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* is not for everyone. Those well versed in *CS*'s charms should stick to the existing free online game,

"Like Vegemite, *Condition Zero* is not for everyone."

while anyone tempted by *CS:CZ*'s Deleted Scenes alone should instead investigate the far more polished counter-terrorist thrills of *Soldier of Fortune II*, based as they are on a 3D engine that doesn't quite qualify for its bus pass yet. In fact, and quite bizarrely, *Condition Zero* seems far better suited to new players; those looking for a more gentle introduction to the maps and tactics of *CS* before tackling the far more uncompromising world of human opponents out there. Let's face it, some folks have years of experience at this FPS alone. There are more veterans than newbies out there.

A mixed bag, then, and hardly worth the years we've had to wait, but far better than Valve's initial official effort at getting the game finished. Happily, publishers Vivendi have finally released it. Thus we're no longer having to safeguard against having to review it all over again by introducing a new PC GAMES ADDICT law: 'Three (Counter-)Strikes and You're Out (of the mag)'.

ROSS ATHERTON

- Publisher **Vivendi** ■ Developer **Valve/Turtle Rock** ■ Minimum System **PII 400, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card**
- Recommended **P4 1GHz, 128Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, internet, up to 32**
- Web Address **www.cs-conditionzero.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Soldier of Fortune II
Ultra-gory counter-terrorist shooter with innovative 'random' multi-player scenarios.

Counter-Strike 1.6
The original and best. Free to anyone who owns *Half-Life*, via www.counter-strike.net.

PC GAMES addict
Brilliant bots turn a potentially lame offering into a solid single-player game.

75%

GENRE: PLATFORM

SONIC ADVENTURE DX DIRECTOR'S CUT

Hedgehog breaks land-speed record. David Attenborough "bemused".

Sonic Adventure is packed full of sub-games.

One million rings. Rule them all.

Brake

HERE'S a thought for you: Sonic the Hedgehog used to be cool. It may be somewhat hard to believe a discoloured hedge rodent was anything other than vaguely laughable, but in the early '90s, surrounded by Pirate TV's Apocalypse Now adverts and living inside the excellently named 'Megadrive', the guy was sub-zero. Clearly, in a post-*GTA* world this is never going to happen again, but playing *Director's Cut* does remind you why a hedgehog seemed so groundbreaking at the time.

It's a conversion of *Sonic Adventure*, which debuted along with the Dreamcast in 1999. Despite the name change it is, to all expert eyes, pretty much indistinguishable from the original. All its (many) faults remain untouched, such as despicable camerawork and some distinctly suspect collision detection. Graphically it's cutting-edge, but cutting-edge from two 3D cards back, so the textures and models seem somewhat garish, with rampant pop-up on some of the more expansive levels. However, within these limits, *Adventure* creates a series of genuinely bizarre, imaginative and mayhem-packed levels. When, for example, the flying battleship you're bouncing around flips 90 degrees, you can't help but admire the panache. As an experience, it still works. As a game, however...

Well, *Sonic* was always the rubbish kid's platform game. No good at games? *Sonic* was for you. In a time when the intricacies of interaction were important, it pioneered the idea of pure sensation. You played *Sonic* because through its induced fictional sensation it made you go faster than you'd gone before. Sure, when you were bouncing around a level you had no real control, but *that wasn't important*. In other words, it was pushing the game-as-rollercoaster approach seen in – say – *Max Payne* or *Medal of Honour* years later.

"So what justifies the 'Director's Cut' line?"

This trend overtakes some sections of *Sonic Adventure*, where you helplessly career around a level, the plaything of the designer's architecture. In fact, if you actually have the audacity to touch the controls while bouncing between a sequence of a dozen bumper pads, you'll find yourself altering the planned route and usually ending up falling to your death. While spectacular, the game often goes too far in this direction.

But it's not all about speed. Despite the title, Sonic is only one of six (count 'em!) possible player characters, with the typically-rubbish tale told from each of their perspectives. By completing each of their adventures, you'll be able to reach the real finale. Luckily, one of these characters is a robot, which gains *Sonic Adventure* an extra five per cent due to the 1962 PC GAMES ADDICT Robosexual act. Phew.

So what justifies the 'Director's Cut' line? Theoretically, the graphics are improved, but it's not really noticeable. All the Sonic Game Gear games are buried in there, however, to be unlocked through extensive play. And there's a mission mode too. So, in other words, nothing justifies the phrase 'Director's Cut'. And while this is an extravagant platform game that's good to see on the PC, certainly nothing justifies its premium price.

KIERON GILLEN

MEXICAN

The plot is, as mentioned in the main text, both bizarre, terribly written and pretty unfathomable at anything but the most basic level if played from the perspective of a single character. However, I would argue that it could have been improved by one simple change. The character, Knuckles the Echidna? Turn him into Knuckles the Enchilada, the fastest fast-food Mexican wrap. C'mon. It's hardly less conceivable than a *hedgehog*.

PCGA PROFILE

Sonic DX is:
- **A dramatic platformer**
- **Technically iffy**
- **A hedgehog**

Sonic DX is not:
- **Brand new**
- **From this millennium**
- **A system hog**

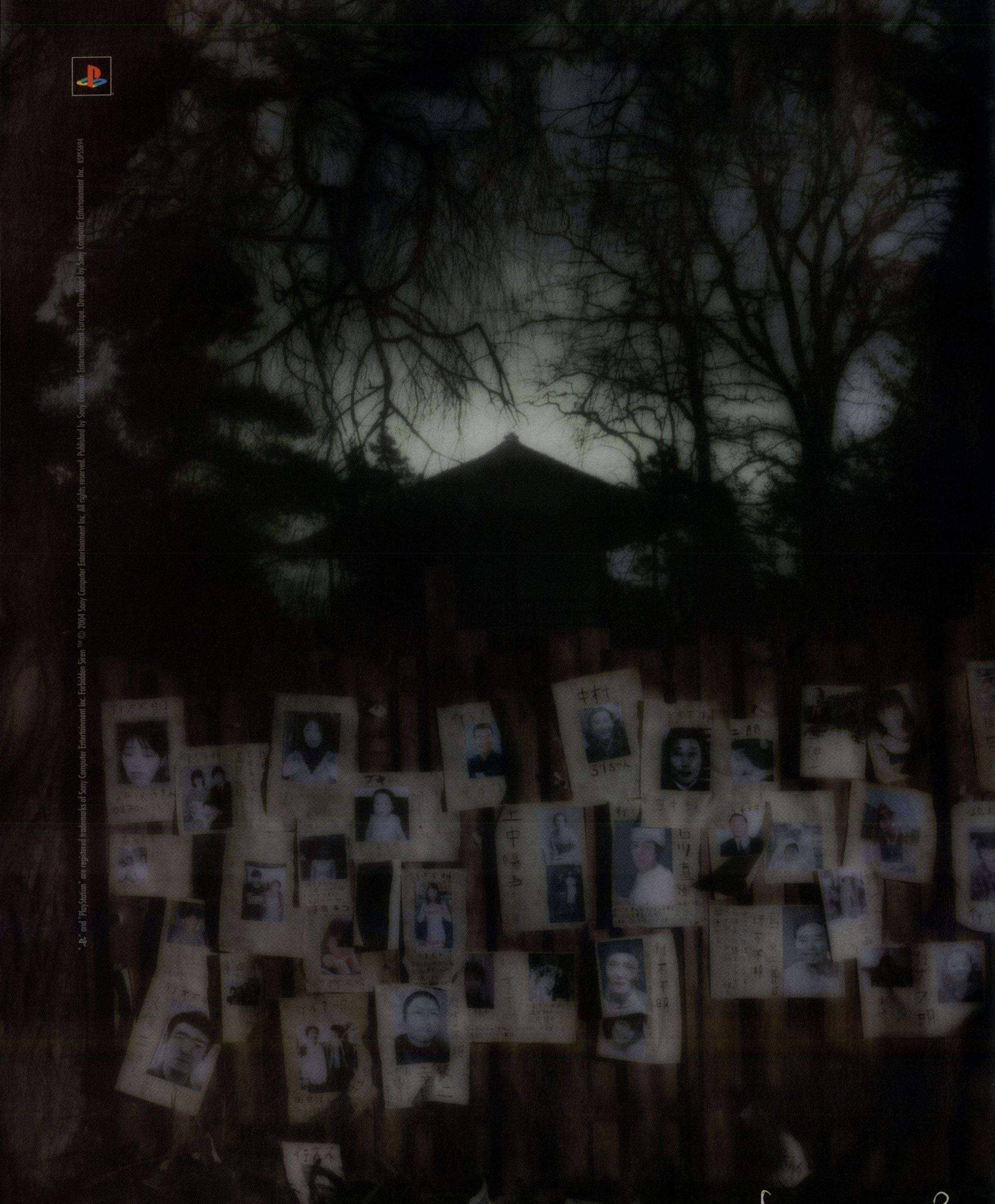
■ Publisher **Sega** ■ Developer **In-house** ■ Minimum System **PIII 600, 128Mb RAM, 700Mb HD, 16Mb 3D card** ■ Recommended **PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, 1.4Gb HD space, 32Mb 3D card**
■ Multi-Player **None** ■ Web Address **www.atari.com.au** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

Prince of Persia 3D
The state of the art in adult-friendly platform games. Exquisite swashbuckling.

Beyond Good & Evil
Epic, traditionally bizarre cross-genre action-adventure. No-one's bought it.

PC GAMES addict
Often good, almost always imaginative, but technically all over the place.
64%



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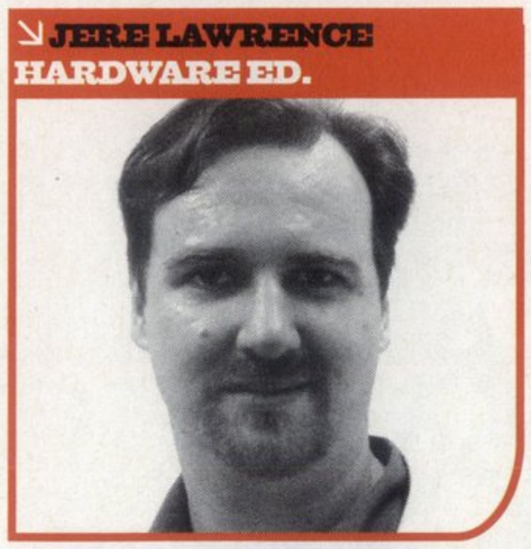
Hardware

Gear/Gadgets/Apps/Utilities Definitive reviews



JUST LIKE OUR GRANDPARENTS, NOW WE TOO CAN GET EXCITED ABOUT "THE WIRELESS" REVOLUTION.

It was only a couple of issues ago that we were discussing Centrino (802.11) wireless communications and much to the chagrin of the technology, when it was first tested, a faulty aerial at City Extra Parramatta caused some doubts regarding the technology. That hiccup aside, Wi-Fi has reached a level of maturity and stability where it works, and although a little expensive, surfing from a public hotspot, whether for work or play, is very addictive. Add a wireless access point to your home and you can move about freely while remaining connected to the Internet. Whether streaming video, music or transferring files you can walk around with your wireless device and it won't skip a beat.

Just to make it perfectly clear, wireless technology works and it works well. So well that Intel are investing hundreds of millions of dollars into expanding the abilities of Wi-Fi (discussed in our tech overview). It may not please electricians who for the last two decades have been making good money out of cabling office blocks. But when you think of the bigger picture, that Wi-Fi is easier to integrate, offers freedom of movement and eradicates the additional cost of UTP cables, it's easy to deduce that big business will be quick to fully adopt it. For manufacturers, this can mean only one thing. Millions of wired PCs are going to need wireless network cards and wireless access points. Profit will be in the billions and wide corporate acceptance of the technology will make it a standard in record time.

Jere Lawrence
Hardware Editor

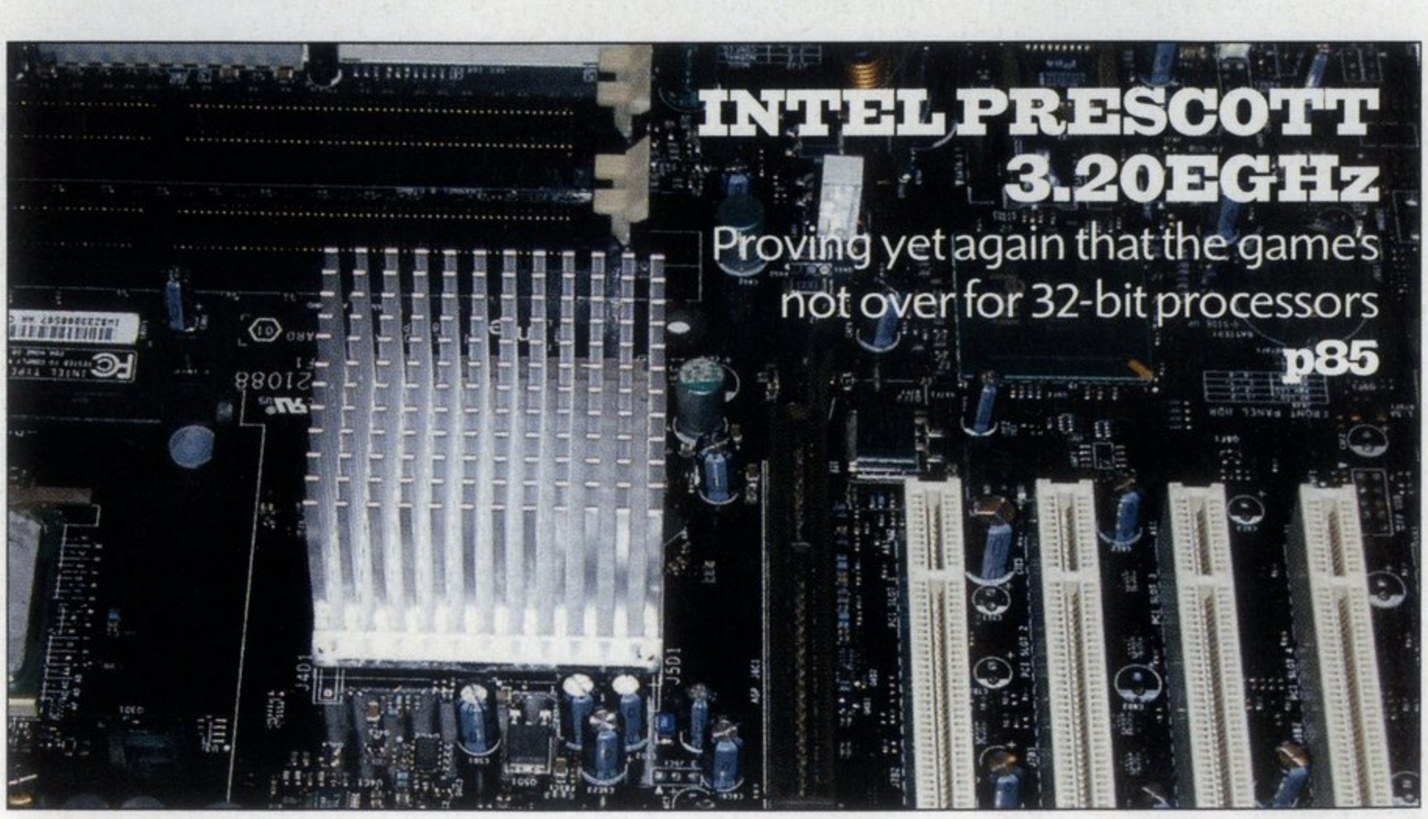
SONY ERICSSON P900 SMARTPHONE

About the only thing this phone doesn't come with is a portable scanner... **p86**

LinkSys Wi-Fi card
Look Ma! We've got no cables on our laptop!

Super Joybox11 Adapter
For better or worse? trade in your PC pad for an Xbox pad.

Creative MuvoTX
256MB of music to bop to on this tiny little player.



INTEL PRESCOTT 3.20EGHz

Proving yet again that the game's not over for 32-bit processors **p85**

WiMax

Wireless broadband to span the world

Just when we're getting our heads around the concept of Hotspots, figuring out where to take our Centrino laptops for a spot of web surfing while eating out, along comes WiMax which ups the ante on the novelty of cappuccino chat rooms. WiMax stands for Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access Forum, an industry group representing equipment makers, service providers and component suppliers who are promoting a new IEEE 802.16a standard. Recognised in January 2003, 802.16a technology is wireless broadband, the next step beyond Wi-Fi or 802.11b/g.

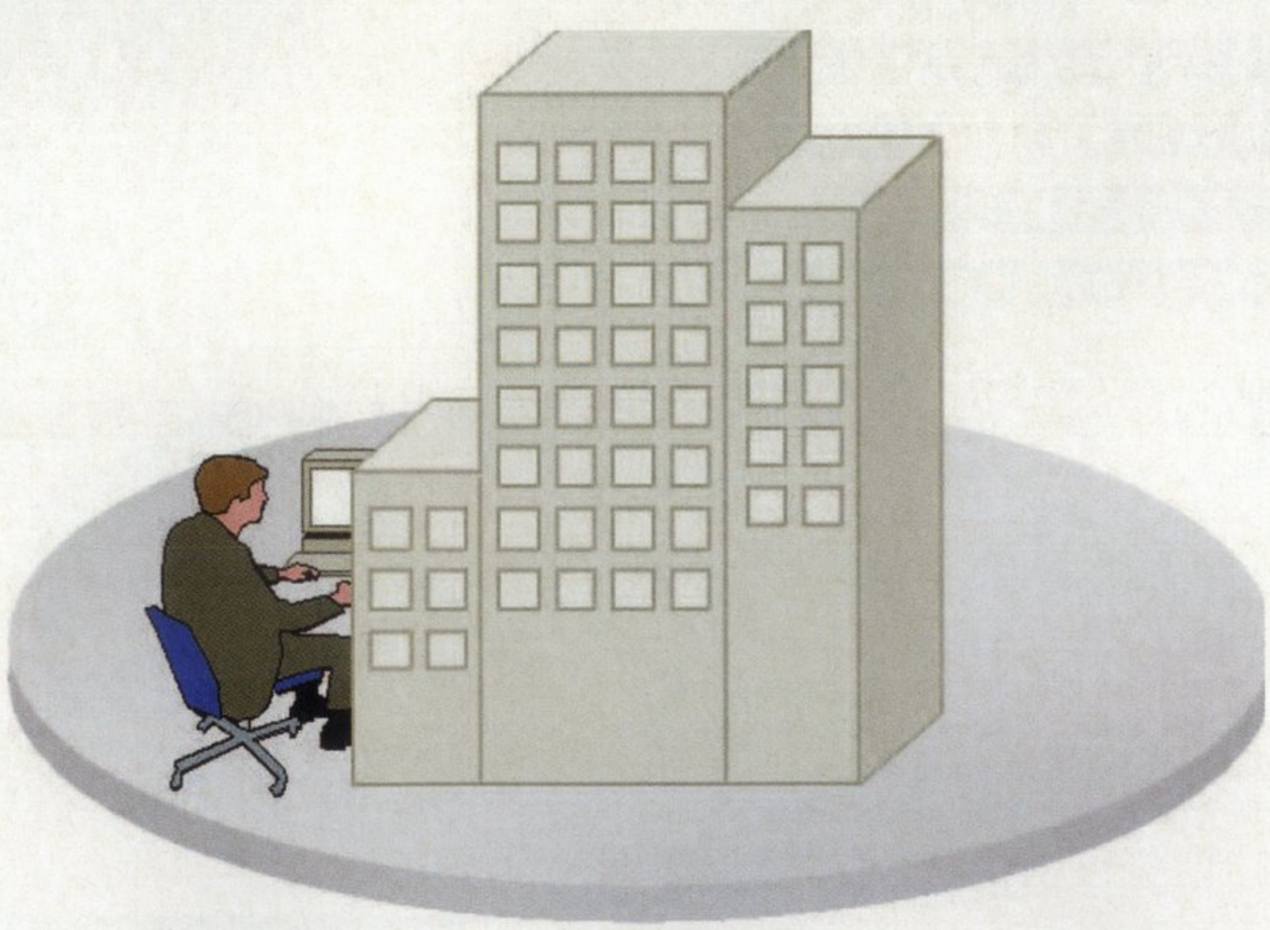
In Australia, acceptance of the 802.11b and 802.11g systems is still in its infancy; the range is limited to a few hundred metres and the signal is easily blocked by environmental factors such as trees and buildings. The 802.16a system has a range of several kilometres and is not dependent on line of sight. This new standard will be powerful and dynamic enough to support over 60 businesses with T1-level connectivity and hundreds of homes with ADSL-rate connectivity. Thus while the Wi-Fi system is the beginning of the wireless revolution, it's clear that a more profitable business model will be achieved using the Wi-Max system, given that base stations can be put in an out of the way place such as a mountain top rather than a building, and will serve a much greater number of clients then just one café.

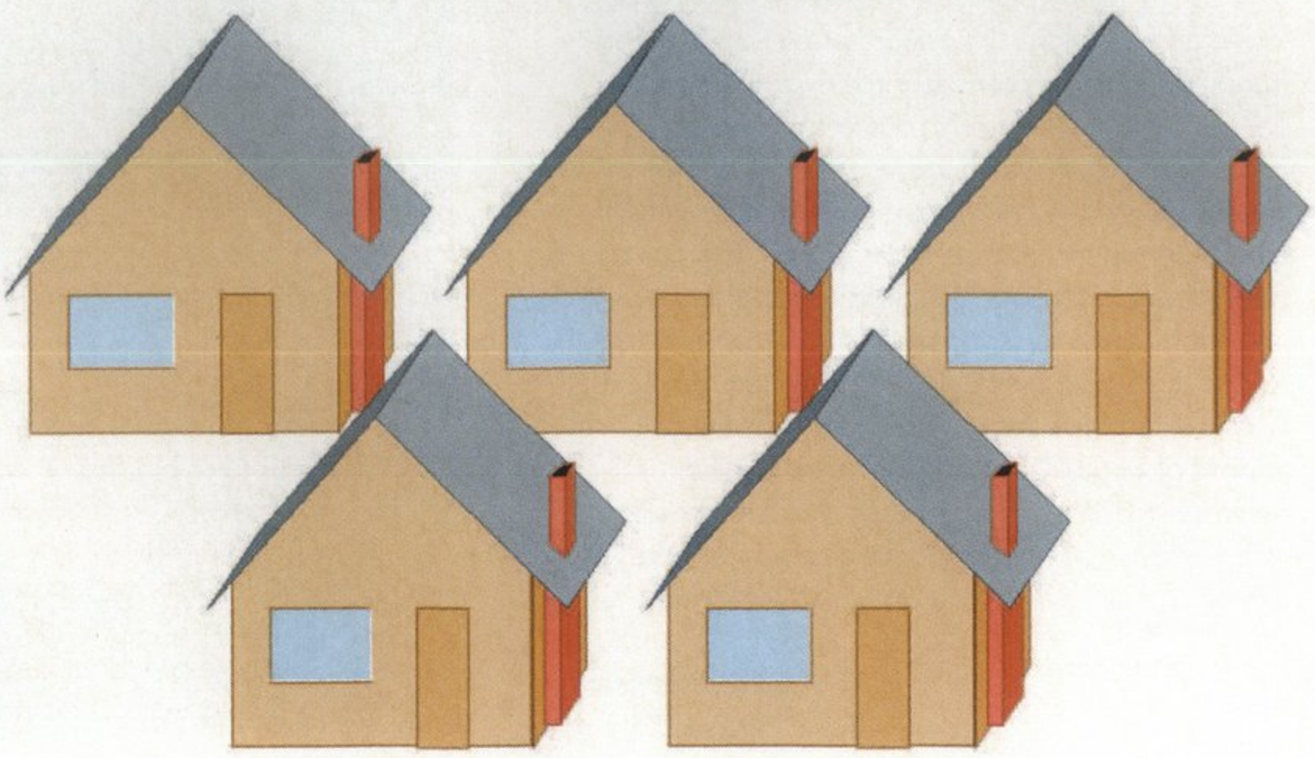
Think about the potential. Wireless broadband access will be gained in those areas that still fall short of current cable and ADSL systems. In Sydney for example there are many areas where the laying of cable stopped due to cost. Because the system can be set up in days rather than weeks and at a reduced cost compared to wired systems, broadband on demand for one-off events such as trade shows will now be feasible. Internet access will now be much more easily available to those remote and regional areas that have lacked wired services due to low population and high implementation and infrastructure costs. 802.16a will enable true nomadic capabilities for users to have wireless access to the Internet outside their homes and offices. Forget trying to locate a Hotspot with decent coffee, you could literally be able to go anywhere.

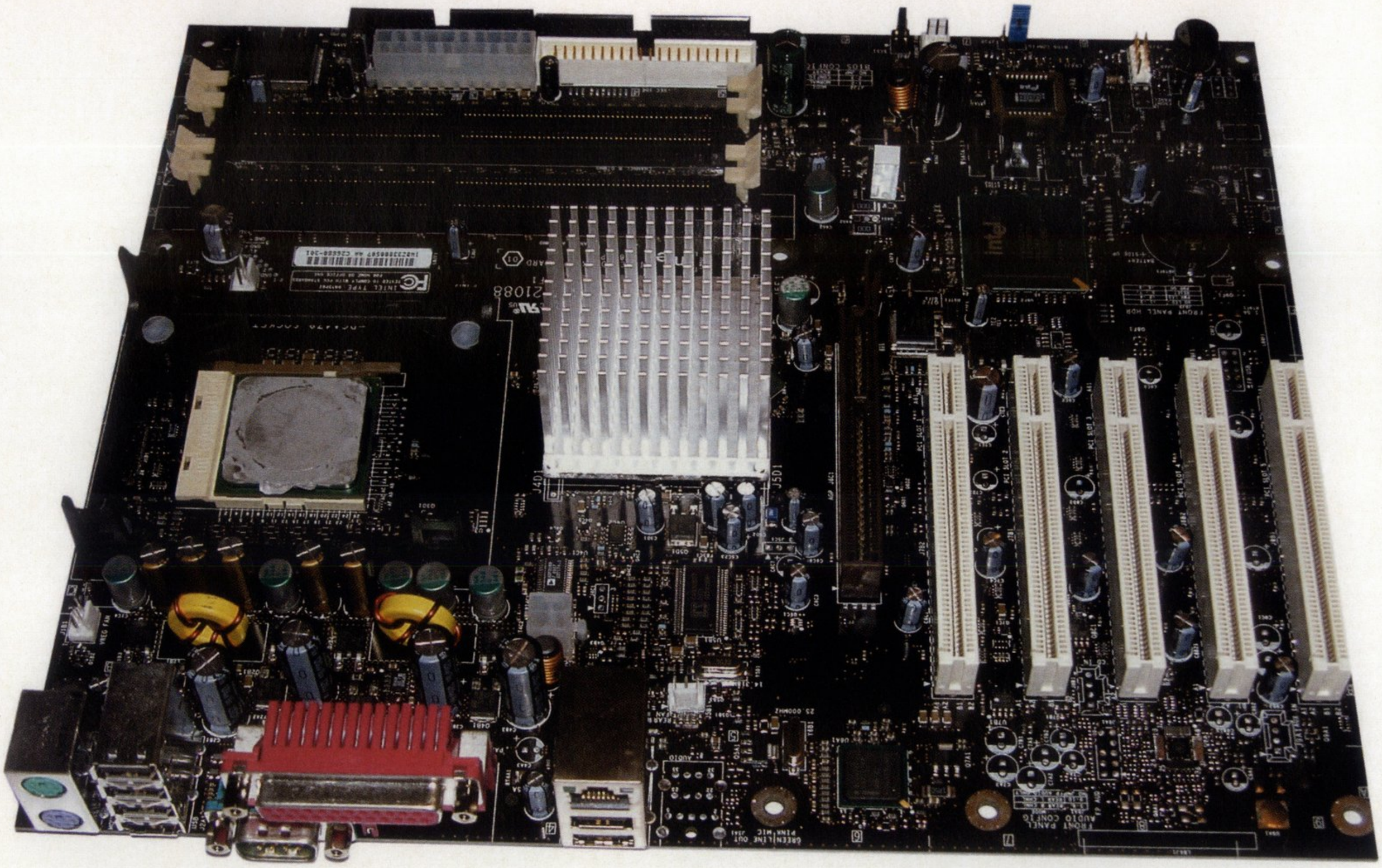
802.16a uses a robust modulation scheme delivering high throughput at long ranges that is tolerant of signal reflection. The new standard will also support mesh topology and smart antennae technology allowing for better utilisation of the spectrum along with other advances such as enhanced security, quality of service and higher data rates.

As there are currently millions of people globally who do not have access to wired broadband connectivity, 802.16a technology will provide the "third pipe" to connect homes, businesses and public 802.11 hotspots to the many benefits of the Internet. We won't be all reading celebrity gossip and downloading videos either; the potential for compute-anywhere technology is astounding and is going to have as profound an effect on computing as mobile phones did in defining the way we communicate.

Ruth Lawrence







Intel Prescott 3.20EGHz

Does Intel's latest line of processors push new boundaries?

As yet to counter AMD's 64-Bit solution, Intel is content to continue to push the boundaries of 32-bit processing and have released a new line of processors, referred to as Prescott. But there's a lot more surrounding this chip than just a faster core and it all begins with the manufacturing process.

In an effort to drive the cost of chip manufacturing down, Intel have upgraded all their production plants with new equipment that allows chips to be made out of 300mm wafers, which just so happen to be cheaper. The other benefit of the factory upgrades is that Intel has been able to reduce the die from 130nm down to an astonishing 90nm. Representing a 30% reduction in size Intel engineers had considerable room to make improvements to the Prescott CPU.

The first tweak that made was to double the amount of cache that the Prescott processor has. L1 cache is now 32KB and the L2 cache has been increased to an impressive 1MB. The next step of the upgrade involved the very complex process of improving branch prediction. This is a CPU technique where it tries to predict when loops and conditions will end or change and then caches the following code. The term "look ahead cache" summarises this rather complex process aptly. Branch Prediction improvements in Prescott are based around observations made in the development of the Pentium M (Centrino) processor and has added some logic to the branch predictor allowing it to identify multiple loop entry/exit points so that it can try to cover all its bases, so to speak. The upshot is that the new logic requires a larger buffer and if the branch predictor gets it completely wrong, flushing a buffer twice the size creates a heftier performance hit. New silicon was also added to increase the size of SSE instruction schedulers, which will bring further improvements to multimedia.

A massively significant change however affects both Hyper-Threading and the floating point processor. In previous Intel processors, integers (whole numbers) that are being multiplied are calculated by the floating point processor which is, supposedly, meant only for decimal numbers. This dramatically affects Hyper threading because on a non Prescott CPU, if there was a call to multiply an integer and calculate a floating point answer simultaneously then Hyper Threading would be useless as both tasks require the FPU and would have to be processed sequentially. The Prescott processor on the other hand no longer needs the FPU for integer multiplications and thus it could Hyper Thread the afore mentioned tasks achieving a 100% performance increase.

The last scraps of silicon remaining, Intel have opted to add even more instructions to the CPU that extend the set of SSE2 instructions called, SSE3. Offering only performance in the future, SSE3 is useless now because no compilers have been taught how to access them. Once patches to different languages start to appear though SSE3 should offer some very significant performance increases. Five new instructions have been added to improve the processing of SIMD (single instruction multiple data) routines, there's an instruction to speed up video decompression, four new instructions that more efficiently handle arrays of structures which will accelerate 3D graphics and two new instructions dedicated to synchronising and improving Hyper Threading performance.

Jere Lawrence

SONY ERICSSON P900 SMARTPHONE

It's a PDA and a phone, and a camera, and a...

The P900 could be best described as a small scale upgrade of the Sony Ericsson P800 and features a better screen, improved memory management and OS upgrades plus some hardware optimisations. This is mainly in the area of size and weight and the newer, sleeker P900 is 5mm thinner and fractionally lighter.

As a PDA the P900 is attractive. Looking like a conventional mobile phone the 208 x 320 x 65000 colour screen is bright, clear and easily read in the sun. As a functioning PDA though, the P900 is good but lacks the kind of flair that Windows CE/Mobile offers. And it's the little things that can become annoying, such as not being able to select text for copying and pasting or a seeming hate for punctuation, except for question marks. Use the stylus to try and enter a full stop, or a comma and insanity will shortly follow.

Entering data into the P900 can be achieved three ways. Using the front flip, SMS thumb bandits can enter text using the numeric keypad, or flip it open and the entire 7cm long screen can be "drawn" on using a stylus and converted into text using handwriting recognition. In this area the P900 is both good and bad, the handwriting recognition is on par with modern iPAQ/Palm PCs but how it works is different. Writing on the top of the screen will produce numbers, the middle of the screen for capital letters and the bottom of the screen creates lower case letters. The problem though is that the delineation between the two areas is vague and you end up with either capitals or lowercase when you don't want them. For the most part though the handwriting recognition works well and it can be quite a pleasure to send an SMS using plain old handwriting.

Phone functionality is really where this device starts to shine. Voice recognition is fully integrated so it's possible to record a "voiceprint" and then have the number dialled simply by saying the name to the phone. Furthermore, the PDA has a digital camera that acts as a still or video camera and you can take a picture of someone and then assign it to their profile so that when they call, the phone displays their image. Another nice touch is that when making a voice call, if the flip is closed you hold the smartphone to your ear like a normal device, however when opening the flip it becomes a very effective speaker phone.

The application suite on offer is quite good but as it uses the Symbian operating system isn't as widely supported as CE. All the usual functions are there such as task list, to-do, calendar, contacts and it can all be synchronised with Outlook. Though email syncing is very poor and only the inbox can be pulled down, with other email folders unselectable. Another gripe regarding software is that being a Sony product, everything costs money. Using a 128MB memory stick duo which the PDA accepts for storage, it's actually possible to use authoring software to convert a DVD into a 98MB MP4, P900 compatible movie file. Is that a cool selling point or what? The problem? The authoring software costs $100US - and so too does just about every other usable but overpriced application. At least you can play MP3s on the device for free.

The final feature of note is GPRS. This is an upgrade to the GSM service that allows for data to be sent over the airwaves the same way that voice is. Functional anywhere there is a mobile phone signal the biggest problem is the price. Vodafone, for example, charge 2c per KB and with every transaction, even if you only use 10KB, you will always be charged in 15KB chunks. Could someone please explain to me where the fun of "anywhere Internet" is when you're constantly paranoid about the excessive charges you're chalking up?

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ An easy to use, highly functional PDA/phone (smartphone)
- ↙ Lacks decent "freeware" software support, poor email synchronisation and no Wi-Fi!

The first in a new wave of PDA/mobile phone hybrids, called Smartphones. The P900 is a fine device but doesn't synchronise as well as a Windows CE PDA. Costly applications also detract from it. Make sure to try before you buy.

78%

→Detail

Network compatibility: Tri band SGM 1900, 1800 and 900
Talk time: 16 hours
Standby time: 480hrs
Connectivity: Sync ML, Memory Stick Duo, Infrared port, GPRS, Bluetooth
Display: 208 x 320 x 65000
Camera: 640 x 480 VGA – still picture and video
Applications: Calendar, to-do, task list, MP3 music player, MP4 video player, sound recorder, SMS, email and jotter (notepad)
OS: Symbian v7.0
Price: $1300
Distributor: Gadgets
Web: www.gadgets.com.au
Phone: 1800 423 438

COMPAQ NOTEBOOK NX7010

The ultimate Hotspot surfing device

It wasn't so long ago that I was praising LG for their entry into the laptop market but along come Compaq to serve me a piece of humble pie. The reason is simple, the nx7010 is just about one of the most perfect consumer laptops available and it's $1300 cheaper than its closest rival.

The 15.4" widescreen runs at a resolution of 1680x1050, which is a glorious sight to behold. The precision with which the TFT screen has been made is astounding and the pixels converge so that text looks as sharp as a laser printed page. And as the screen is 16:10 widescreen, DVDs play perfectly proportionate and are a delight to watch.

Another advantage of the widescreen format is that the keyboard is able to be spaced out, making it easier to type on. The JBL speakers on either side produce excellent sound. The touchpad is standard for a notebook but the exception is the scroll wheel which is actually a touchpad and by sliding your finger up or down it, scrolling a page becomes effortless. Topping it all off is a 1.6Ghz Centrino processor, 512MB of memory, a 60GB 5400 RPM hard disk, Radeon Mobility 9200 plus 802.11b and Bluetooth communications. And it's so light, at 2.95kg it's a joy to carry around.

HP is positioning itself to become a major player in the market by selling high quality units at a midrange price – definitely worth taking advantage of in you're in the market for a notebook.

→Detail

Audio: Integrated JBL Pro speakers and integrated 16-bit sound
Battery life: 5 hours
Communications: 56K modem, 10/100 NIC, Intel Pro Wireless 2100 (802.11b), Bluetooth
Dimensions: 34.5mm (H) x 254mm (W) x 355.6mm (D)
Display: 15.4" colour TFT (1680 x 1050)
Graphics: ATi Mobility Radeon 9200 64MB
Hard Disk: 60GB
Memory: 512MB
Optical Drive: DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo
Ports: Type II PCMCIA, Parallel, 1394 Firewire, S-video out, VGA out, Port Replicator connection, Headphones, Microphone, RJ-11, RJ-45, Infrared, 3x USB 2.0
Processor: Intel Centrino Pentium M 1.6GHz
Weight: 2.95kg
Price: $ 3295
Distributor: Harris Technology
Web: www.harristechnology.com.au
Phone: 1300 139 999

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Beautiful 15.4" widescreen display, runs like a dream and is priced to sell
- ↙ Only 802.11b (11Mbps) communications. If it supported 802.11g (54Mbps) it would be perfect

This notebook looks great, performs fantastically, is light, thin and generously decked out with 512MB of memory and a 60GB hard disk. A low price ensures that the technology is available to a wide consumer base too.

95%

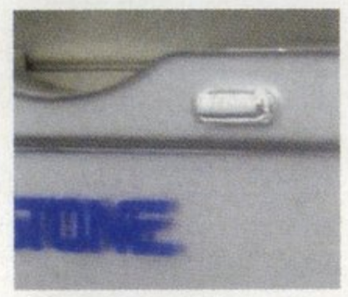
ASTONE IDEQ 200T

I like my bare bones, wireless

In what is likely to become an ever increasing growing trend, what sets this system apart from other offerings is that it features one of the first motherboards with built in Wi-Fi. Utilising the 802.11b (11Mbps) standard, the on board Wi-Fi is an excellent beginning, especially when you it's put to good use, such as a wireless means of streaming MP3s.

The on-board motherboard is quite good in that established standard kind of way. Utilising the i865 chipset the board supports DDR400 memory in a dual channel configuration and can utilise any P4C or Prescott processor. Another particularly pleasant surprise is the inclusion of a SATA RAID controller and a 6 channel audio solution with SPDIF (optical) out which further confirms this product as a viable Home Theatre, lounge room solution.

The case is quite solid and coated in an attractive black glaze that allows it to blend in with the other Hi-Fi devices comfortably. Aesthetic touches include a CD flap that opens and closes respectively with the tray and a transparent face plate. But the big surprise is that this barebones system isn't so bare. Shipping with a Pentium 3.06GHz CPU, 120GB WD hard disk, 512MB of memory, a floppy drive and 52 x CDRW it's quite the bargain. The on board Intel Extreme Graphics 2 VPU is a little slow for hardcore gaming though otherwise this is a very complete mini system.



→Detail

Chipset : Intel 865G + Intel ICH5R
Memory:512MB Dual Channel DDR 400. Max 2GB
HDD:120GB WD SATA
IDE Controllers: ATA-100, Serial ATA (w/RAID)
Audio: 6 Channel audio and digital SPDIF
Video: Internal Extreme Graphics 2
Ports: AGP (8X), 1x PCI, IEEE1394A, SPDIF Input, Microphone, Headphone, 2 x USB2.0, SPDIF output, RJ45, VGA, 1 x Serial, 1x PS/2, Line in,
Additional Features: 802.11b Wireless LAN, Serial ATA RAID
Power Supply: 200W
Dimensions: 210 (W) x 323 (D) x 187 (H) mm
Price: $1340
Distributor: Achieva
Web: www.achieva.com.au
Phone: (02) 9742 3288

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ A well decked out mini system at an affordable price
- ↙ Needs a faster video card

This well presented mini system is a well built "clone" that features a 3.06GHz processor, 120GB hard disk and 512MB of RAM. Perfectly usable as a PC in its own right the in-built Wi-Fi and stylish black case makes for a mighty fine wireless MP3 player/multimedia centre.

82%

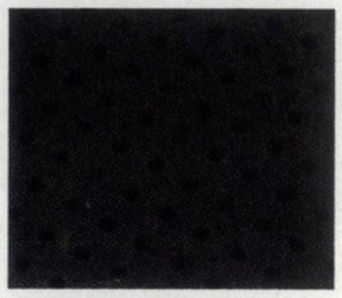
LINKSYS WIRED/WIRELESS ROUTER WG54RT

It's a Cisco, but you don't need certification to use it

As the subtitle alludes, Linksys is actually a division of Cisco systems, the Silicon Valley giant responsible for some of the best Internet routers in the world and also renowned for their evil certification process. The kind where they lock you in a room causing massive system failures which you have to repair in a timely fashion – Oh, and ninja's too, they drop down from the ceiling if any examinee isn't sweating hard enough.

Affordable and easy to use, this Linksys router is a one stop device that can act as a switch for up to four PCs using conventional, wired UTP and also acts as an 802.11g (54Mbps) wireless access point (WAP). Being a router, this clever device is also capable of sharing your Internet connection and is fully compatible with broadband connection methodologies in this country, PPPoE (ADSL) and DHCP (Cable).

Installation is remarkably simple. It's just a matter of connecting up a wired or wireless device to the router and jumping on to its webpage at 192.168.1.1. where you can enter userids and passwords to connect to the Internet. Other functionality also allows for the setting of static routes or the designation of a PC on the network to be an automatically, port forwarded, demilitarised zone (DMZ). The device does come with a setup CD that promises automatic configuration but freaks out if your PC has more than one network card. It's not really necessary though because if you know how to navigate around web pages you can configure this router.



→Detail

Standards: IEEE 802.3 (10BaseT), IEEE802.3u (10BaseTX), IEEE 802.11b (11MBps Wi-Fi), IEEE 802.11g (54Mbps Wi-Fi)
Channels: 11
Ports: Internet: One 10/100 RJ-45, LAN: Four 10/100 RJ-45 switched Ports
Firewall: Stateful Packet Inspection (SPI)
Wireless Security: Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA), Wireless MAC filtering, WEP.
Price: $ 189
Distributor: Harris Technology
Web: www.harristechnology.com.au
Phone: 1300 139 999

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ 802.11g (54Mbps) functionality, 4 port Ethernet switch(hub) and full routing
- ↙ The automatic configuration CD only works on the most basic of systems

A complete home networking solution, this router will take input from wired (UTP) and wireless (802.11b and g) machines on the network as well as sharing the Internet.

90%

LINKSYS WI-FI PCMCIA CARD - WPC54G

Teach an old notebook new tricks

If the hardware intro couldn't have made it any clearer, wireless technology is a rapidly growing area of network communications. The technology works well and the ability to connect to Hotspots in public areas is an enticing reason to upgrade.

Being a PCMCIA card, compatibility isn't an issue at all - on the hardware level that is. OS speaking the card comes with drivers for Windows 98SE, Me and 2000 but as is often the case with these past OS's there can be difficulties in getting it all to work. Windows XP however is the most seamless of the install bases and from the very moment you insert the PCMCIA card it's registered, installed and if there's a wireless access point around, connected.

Utilising the 802.11g specification the Wi-Fi card can transfer data at 54Mbps which is around 108 times faster than an ADSL connection. Range is particularly excellent and in all our testing, even whilst walking in and out of walled areas the card maintained a strong signal and was able to stream video effortlessly. A point to consider, the PCMCIA card reported a stronger signal than two Centrino notebooks with their "on die" (build into the chip) antennae. Interestingly, you can even plug this card straight into a Centrino notebook and it will install and co-exist peacefully with the other wireless connection which makes this device an excellent way of upgrading an 802.11b notebook to 802.11g.

→Detail

Standards: IEEE 802.11b (11MBps Wi-Fi), IEEE 802.11g (54Mbps Wi-Fi)
Channels: 11
Interface: Cardbus
Security: WEP, AES, TKIP, 802.1x
WEP keys: 64 and 128 bit
Price: $ 139
Distributor: Harris Technology
Web: www.harristechnology.com.au
Phone: 1300 139 999

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Full 802.11g communications for any notebook or device that has a PCMCIA slot
- ↙ Operating Systems other than XP can be a little trickier to install

Whether you're looking to add Wi-Fi functionality to a notebook or upgrade 11Mbps 802.11b to 802.11g this card will serve you well

85%

CAPTURE THE MOMENT...

BUYING ADVICE
SHOOTING TUTORIALS
PRINTER PICKS
EDITING TRICKS
REVISED & UPDATED! 2ND EDITION
YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO BUYING AND USING YOUR DIGITAL CAMERA
Digital Camera
ESSENTIALS
Complete digital
BUYER'S GUIDE
33 CAMERAS REVIEWED INSIDE!
FROM $450 TO $15,000. FIND THE RIGHT CAMERA FOR YOU!
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Paint Shop Photo Album 4 Starter Kit
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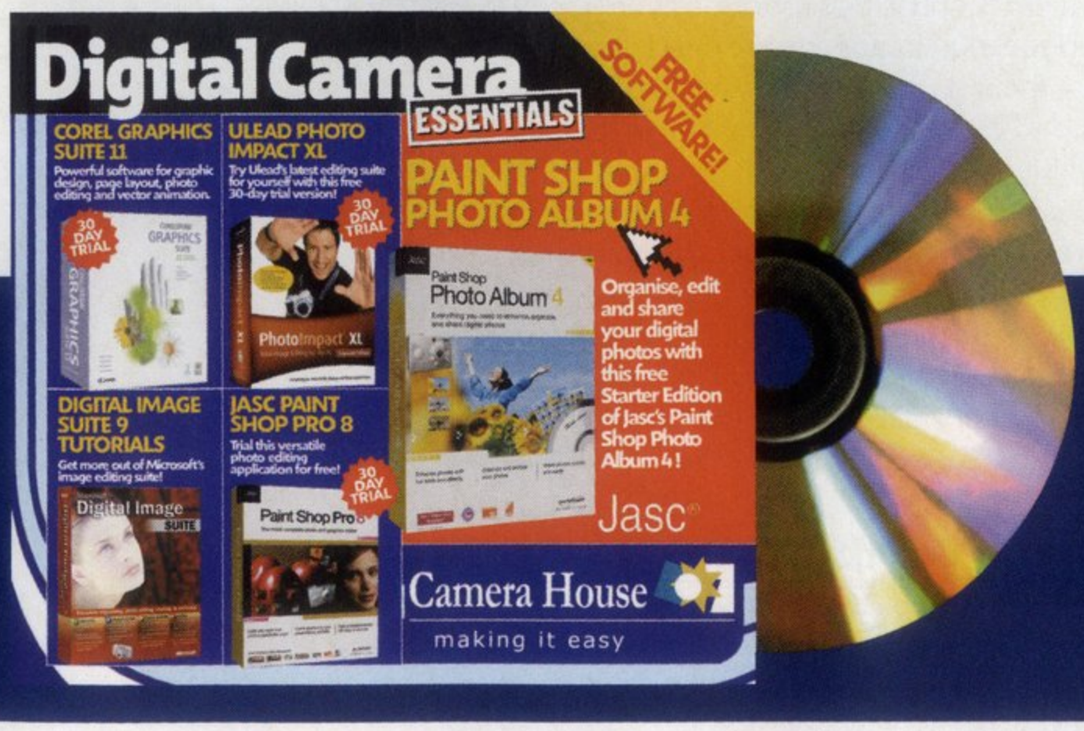
Digital Camera ESSENTIALS


Digital Camera
ESSENTIALS
FREE SOFTWARE!
COREL GRAPHICS SUITE 11
Powerful software for graphic design, page layout, photo editing and vector animation.
30 DAY TRIAL
ULEAD PHOTO IMPACT XL
Try Ulead's latest editing suite for yourself with this free 30-day trial version!
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Organise, edit and share your digital photos with this free Starter Edition of Jasc's Paint Shop Photo Album 4!
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DIGITAL IMAGE SUITE 9 TUTORIALS
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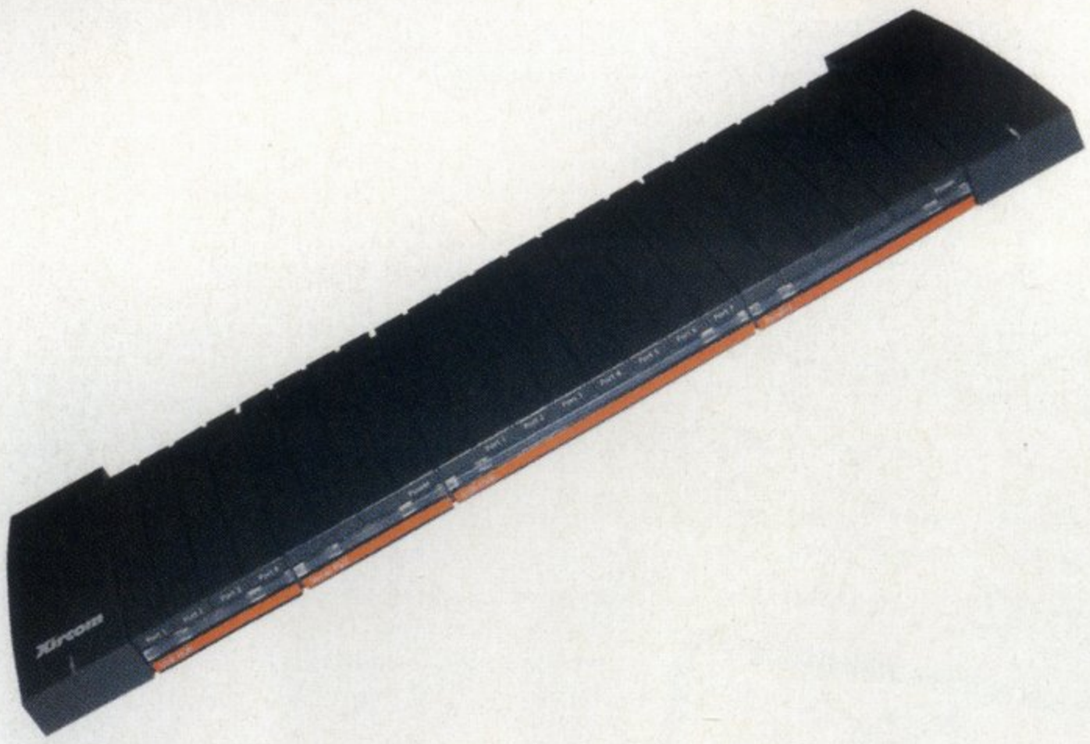


XIRCOM PORTSTATION

Little hubs, big hubs they're all the same to a USB device

The Xircom PortStation is a rather interesting device that at first seems like nothing more than a glorified hub, but there's actually a bit more going on. The reason it's called a PortStation is because it handles more than just USB devices. Such as parallel, serial ports and PS/2 (mouse) ports. The premise is simple, connect the PortStation to one USB port on your PC and every port connected to the PortStation will become available through windows. It's essentially a much easier way of connecting older devices without having to add cards to a PC that uses up a slot and in some situations can be an absolute nightmare to configure.

The modules fit together quite easily and each has a front display with LEDs to signal communication. The downside though is that this device only supports USB 1.1, not USB 2.0. For the most part this isn't a problem as joysticks, steering wheels, printers and USB cameras will all work fine. External hard disks and memory card readers are however affected by this and in the case of external CD-ROMs the transfer rate will drop down to around 8x.

The upside of this though is that the PortStation is cheap and thrifty shoppers can take advantage of the fact that Xircom's loss is their gain.

→Detail

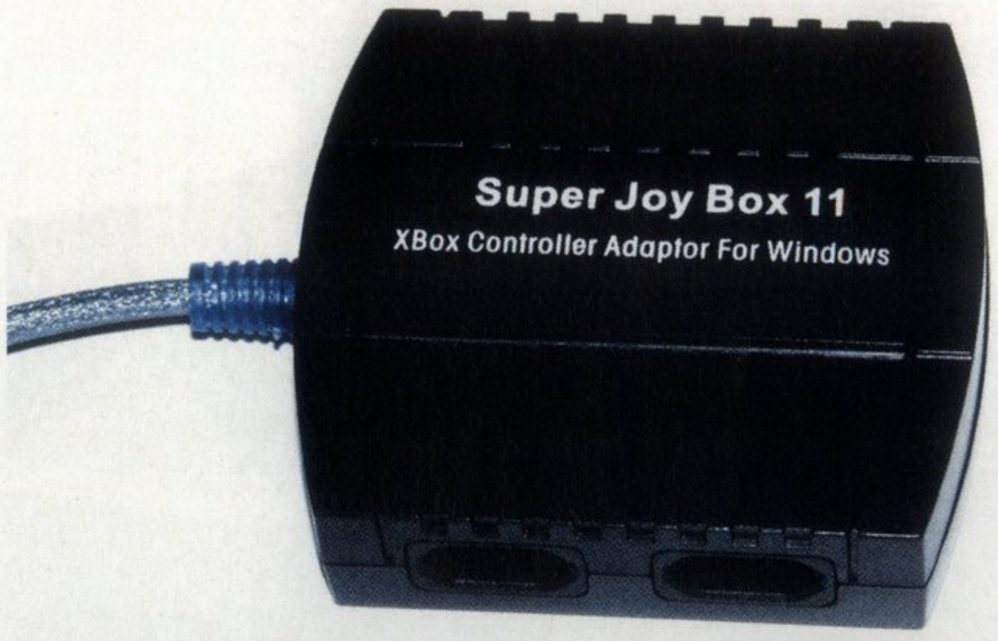
Ports: Parallel, 2 x PS/2 (mouse/keyboard), 11 x USB
Interface: USB 1.1
Price: $60
Distributor: Compuparts
Web: www.compuparts.com.au
Phone: (02) 9482 2582

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Expands your PC with a number of older and more difficult ports to install plus acts as a USB hub
- ↙ Only supports USB 1.1

More than just a USB this port replicator adds Parallel, serial and PS/2 connections to expand a PC simply with. Only one USB cable needs to be connected to the PC allowing for a simple means of expanding I/O.

68%



SUPER JOY BOX 11 – XBOX TO PC ADAPTOR

Finally, a solution to address the problem of bad PC gamepads

Thanks to products like the Super Joy Box we don't have to wait for Windows Longhorn and the Xbox 2 for inter-compatibility because this clever device allows you to use Xbox controllers on your PC. Even better, the controller can take input from four Xbox controllers which are seen by DirectInput as individual gamepads. Now admittedly there aren't a lot of games designed for the PC to take advantage of multi player gaming but there is a literal gold mine of such titles available through legitimate emulation sites for retro gaming.

The hardware emulation the Joy Box offers is exemplary. When installed, it identifies itself as a USB hub and each controller is seen simply as a USB device. This not only allows for extremely fine capturing of controls (feel and responsiveness is identical to that of the Xbox) but also allows for all the controller functions to operate correctly. Vibration Feedback is supported as are the two analogue thumbpads and the analogue triggers. As for the rest of the buttons they are, of course, all included in the emulation, right down to the clickable thumb sticks.

The super Joy Box range also extends into the realms of PS/2 and Gamecube controller emulation so depending on who makes your favourite console controller, it's now usable on PC. And it costs next to nothing when you consider that entire new ranges of game controllers suddenly become available.

→Detail

Ports: 4 x Xbox controller
Interface: USB 1.1
Price: $35
Distributor: PC Case Gear
Web: www.pccasegear.com.au
Phone: (03) 9584 7266

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Perfect emulation of Xbox controllers
- ↙ The drivers come on 3.5" Floppy disk, not CD. Who uses floppies anymore?!

This does exactly what it says. Acts as an Xbox joystick hub that allows for four controllers to be plugged in and emulated flawlessly. Opens up a whole new range of peripherals for the PC.

92%

Australia's best gadget magazine

T3

JUKEBOX JURY
Can the latest challengers steal the iPod's crown?

+

FIGHT CLUB
20 gaming gizmos that will blow your opponents away!

MOVIE STARS
We audition five home cinema kits to suit any budget

Mega Mobile
NOKIA UNVEILS ITS ONE-MEGAPIXEL CAMERA PHONE

+43 REVIEWS
FUJITSU C2310
JVC GR-PD1
CREATIVE MUVO2
FUJIFILM F610
AND MANY MORE!

ADVANCED!
Why you'll want the next-gen Game Boy

HOW TO
USE WINDOWS ON A MOBILE PHONE
SCAN YOUR OLD PHOTOGRAPHS
...ETOOTH

WIN!
A $3,499 PHILIPS DVD SYSTEM!

WIN! THIS PHILIPS DVD+RW SYSTEM WORTH $

Australia's best gadget magazine

GAMES > DVD > MP3 > PDAS > CAMERAS > PHONES > CARS

ON SALE NOW

UNBRANDED MP3 PLAYER

MP3: Attack of the clones

As predicted right here in this magazine only months ago the portable flash drive/MP3 player has become popular enough to be cloned at the hub of cheap electronics, Asia. A big thumbs up for presentation, this MP3 player is well designed and shows how a few curves in the right places can do wonders for an item's aesthetics. The LCD display is equally impressive as it uses a dot matrix array allowing for the display of double byte Asian characters along with a mini graphical display for volume. The buttons however are a little flimsy and made only of plastic and susceptible to wear but they're housed well and click in with a solid, secure feel.

Now before we get to the less exemplary parts of the MP3 player let's examine the price. At $85 this is one of the first sub-$100 MP3 players around and is laudable because it forces a little more competition out of the big players and also makes the technology accessible to the broader budget-conscious audiences.

That said, the sound output of the player doesn't quite meet the standards of MSI or Creative and is best described as a little muddy. We're not talking about quality that is so bad you recoil in horror at the mutilation of your favourite music but rather a slight distortion is discernible at loud peaks. The graphic equaliser can be used to alleviate this but unfortunately the presets aren't worth using as they commit unnatural acts on the sound waves. The overall volume could also be a little louder as you can only do moderate damage to your ear drums at max.

It's a 128MB portable flash drive, a quite decent MP3 player a Dictaphone and only $85.

→Detail

Capacity: 128MB
Music Format: MP3
Equaliser Effects: Yes
LCD Board: 96x26 lattice
Backlight: Blue
Record: High quality, Normal or Fine
USB: 1.1
Play time: 8 hours per battery
Signal to Noise Ratio: 90dB
Output Range: 20HZ – 20KHz
Recording Frequency: 8KHz
MP3 decompression speeds: 32Kbps – 256Kbps
Size: 83mm (L) x 32mm (W) x 21mm (H)
Weight: 32g without battery
Price: $85
Distributor: Compuparts
Web: www.compuparts.com.au
Phone: (02) 9482 2582

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ It's an MP3 player for less than $100
- ↙ Can't play WMA files, only MP3

An extremely affordable MP3 player that does a quite good job of playing music but don't be expect it to be equivalent to a player that's twice the price.

80%

CREATIVE MUVO TX

Such a big sound from such a little player

Creative are suffering something of a marketing crisis. They were out in the early nineties pioneering MP3 players with the likes of the Diamond Rio, but a certain aggressive Apple marketing campaign has most people believing that it was the iPod that started the music revolution.

This long history however has given Creative plenty of time to "iron out the bugs", so to speak, and the Muvo TX is quite an improvement over the original Muvo. Available in 128MB and 256MB models the small, light and stylish unit features a high res dot matrix LCD screen that makes great use of graphics and symbols. The buttons are all made of metal and thus highly durable and click solidly and comfortably.

The biggest improvement to the TX though is sound output. Its deep bass tones and superbly clear sound make it a joy to listen to. Vastly improved is the volume which can now be turned up much louder than its predecessor. Mercifully, even when set to the maximum volume, there is no distortion at all. The EQ effects are all excellent and there's a fully graphical equaliser that you can tweak to create the perfect soundscape and it can also be used as a Dictaphone that's able to store many hours of voice

But as alluded to above, the real reason why you would be attracted to this player is the very high quality sound output though the price presents somewhat of a quandary. At $400 for the 256MB version you can pick up a 15GB iPod for only $50 more.

→Detail

Recording: IMA ADPCM Mono
32hrs (IMA ADPCM)
Interface: USB 2.0 (backward compatible with USB1.1)
Capacity: 256MB
Power: 1 x AAA Alkaline Battery
Battery Usage: Up to 15hrs of MP3 continuous playtime, Up to 11hrs of WMA continuous playtime
Size: 36.7 (W) x 74 (H) x 16mm (D)
Weight: 43g with battery, 31.5g without battery
Frequency Response: 20Hz to 20kHz
Signal to Noise Ratio: 90dB
Harmonic Distortion
Output: 0.05%
Price: $ 399
Distributor: Creative
Web: australia.creative.com
Phone: (02) 9666 6100

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ The best sounding flash based player available
- ↙ Only 256MB for $400 doesn't rate high on the bang for buck scale

A tiny MP3 player that sounds as good as a high end sound system but suffers from a painful case of price bloat. For miniaturisation freaks and the wealthy

83%

ICEMAT

The Icemat people show us why glass is best left in windows

Glass. At first thought it might seem like a smart choice for a surface to use a mouse on. It's smooth, you know, as smooth as glass, slick and maybe even a little slippery. The realities however are a lot different to the romanticised notions above because when you place your mouse down on the surface and attempt to use it there is a rather unpleasant, almost scratching noise that causes spasms in that squeaky balloon kind of way.

The next most notable problem is that when using a mouse the glass isn't that slippery at all. Perhaps ideal for those who like to play the sniper, if anything the glass actually resists the mouse and in a circle strafe fire-fight doesn't respond anywhere near fast enough to be competitive. As alluded to before though "grippiness" can actually be an advantage if you're sniping as the Icemat offers extremely fine, pixel by pixel control that increased the rate of headshots (it's a gruesome business, gaming) and hits overall.

Construction wise the Icemat is literally a piece of glass with a transfer on the bottom and four rubber feet. Consider the above carefully though. It's a sheet of glass, like in a window, and all the same rules apply. Drop it and it will break. Drop something heavy on it and it will break. The Func 1030 mousepad is in no fear of losing its top spot to the Icemat.

→Detail

Dimension: 250mm (W) x 210 mm (D)
Price: $59.95
Distributor: PC Casegear
Web: www.pccasegear.com.au
Phone: (03) 9584 7266

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ Good fine control which is advantageous for sniping
- ↙ Makes unpleasant scratching sound and offers too much resistance for fast FPS gaming

It's a piece of glass that you use your mouse on which unfortunately doesn't work too well. Not slick enough, makes an unpleasant scratching noise and is quite fragile.

42%

DELUXE LAN CARRY SYSTEM

Sling your Desktop over your shoulder, without getting a hernia

LAN gaming has been alive and well since coaxial cables, t-pieces and terminators have been used to connect a few PCs together. In fact wherever you find a garage and a large collection of computer literate friends, chances are that some LAN action is going on.

Of course one of the biggest obstacles involved with a LAN party is trying to lug a fully decked out PC over to a friend's house. But forget the banana box or sports bag from the eighties because the LAN bag is a highly convenient way of moving your gear around.

Fitting around your PC like a bullet proof vest, the fully adjustable straps allow the bag to be placed over most normal PCS. Mid size cases fit by default and by extending the length of the straps, a full tower can be saddled up. But first you may want to ask yourself this question. "How wise is it to carry a Full Tower case around on your shoulder?" If the answer isn't obvious to you, go fill a bag with about ten bricks and lug it around on your back for a while.

Lovingly designed, the LAN bag features a plethora of pockets so that the necessary parts of a PC can be brought along. Mouse pockets accommodate your furless rodent perfectly, a keyboard sized pouch is a nice inclusion and a host of other pockets and flaps make this an attractive and stylish way to transport a PC.

→Detail

Fitting Size: 122cm – 145cm top to bottom, 120cm – 150cm around the side
Handles: Carry handle and shoulder strap
Pouches: 4
Price: $39.50
Distributor: PC Case Gear
Web: www.pccasegear.com.au
Phone: (03) 9584 7266

PCGA Verdict

- ↗ An ingenious way to safely get your PC from one location to another
- ↙ Have you ever tried carrying a Desktop system on your shoulder? It hurts, it hurts a lot

A well designed textile, the LAN bag has a handle or shoulder strap that makes it considerably easier to carry your Desktop computer around. Easy to fit on and plenty of pockets and pouches make for a well thought out carry bag

88%

MODDIN' ART

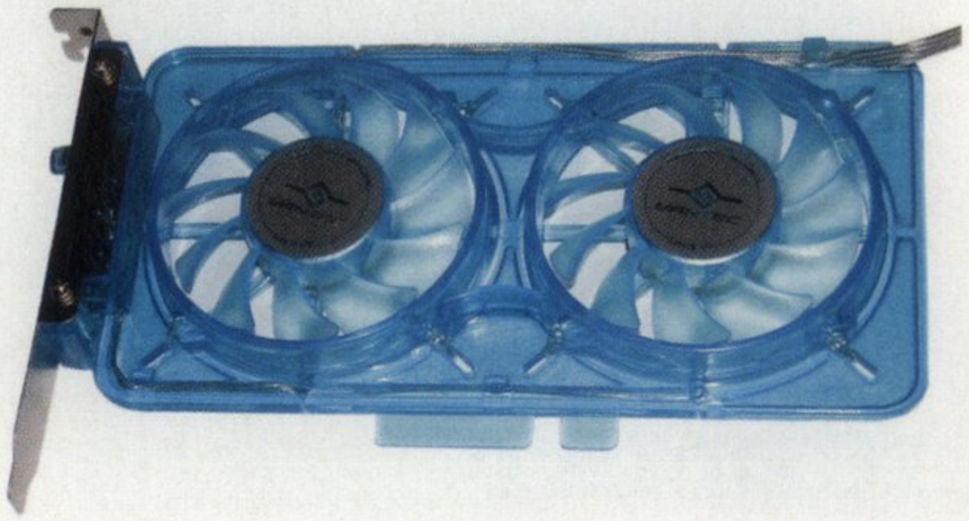
Where common sense gives way to the authority of aesthetics

VANTEC SPECTRUM UV FAN CARD

Price: $24.95
Distributor: PC Case Gear
Phone: (03) 9584 7266
PCGA Installation Rating: Easy – you just plug it into a PCI port – only one screw required
PCGA Verdict: Modding doesn't get much easier than this and as it gives off ultraviolet light, opens up new UV related, modding opportunities.

Modding, it just keeps on getting easier, so easy that with this device you only need to use one screw to install it. Essentially a set of fans mounted onto a PCI card this mod is particularly useful because if you have a large number of PCI devices, they can draw enough power to raise the overall temperature of the case and need cooling down to prolong the life of a PC's precious components.

It wouldn't be a mod without pretty lights though and Vantec aren't about to disappoint because as the name implies, the card is lit by a rather powerful set of ultraviolet LEDs. Powerful enough to illuminate the machine in a soft bluish glow there's also the added advantage of UV excitable products basking in the soft light without the need to install a cold cathode tube.

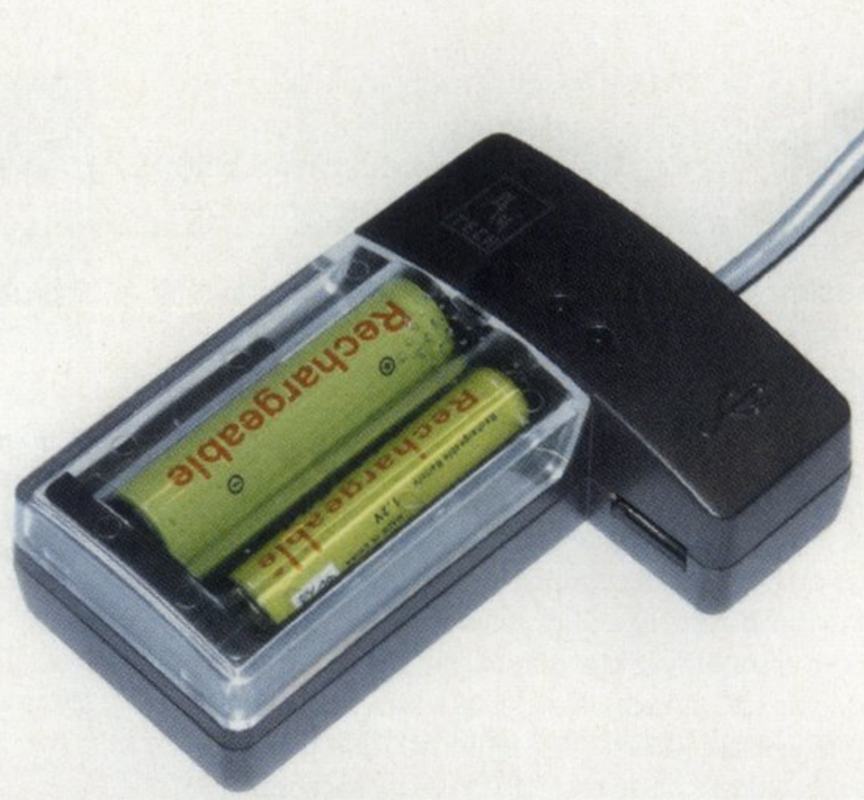


USB BATTERY CHARGER

Price: $24.95
Distributor: PC Case Gear
Phone: (03) 9584 7266
PCGA Installation Rating: Easy – Plugs into a spare USB port
PCGA Verdict: Rechargeable batteries are a great way to use portable/wireless devices and by taking power from the USB port doesn't require a bulky transformer to be plugged into the 240V mains.

I hate cables and transforming power supplies! Surrounded by their twisting snaking evilness all over my desk, attempting to rescue a buried item from their suffocating python like grip is akin to playing barrel of monkeys except in this perverse version, the monkeys don't want to let go. Worse are the box shaped transforming power supplies that when plugged into a powerboard selfishly take up multiple ports because of their unchecked girth.

Now I'm not about to say that this battery charger is wireless, but as it uses a USB port is a lot friendlier on the home front. Able to charge AA and AAA batteries it supports the majority of portable devices such as MP3 players, wireless mice or anything that needs batteries. It's also small for a charger and can be placed unobtrusively on the desk. A nice bonus is that the package comes with two rechargeable AA and AAA batteries and the port it's plugged into isn't lost because the charger also features its own USB port that devices can be used on.

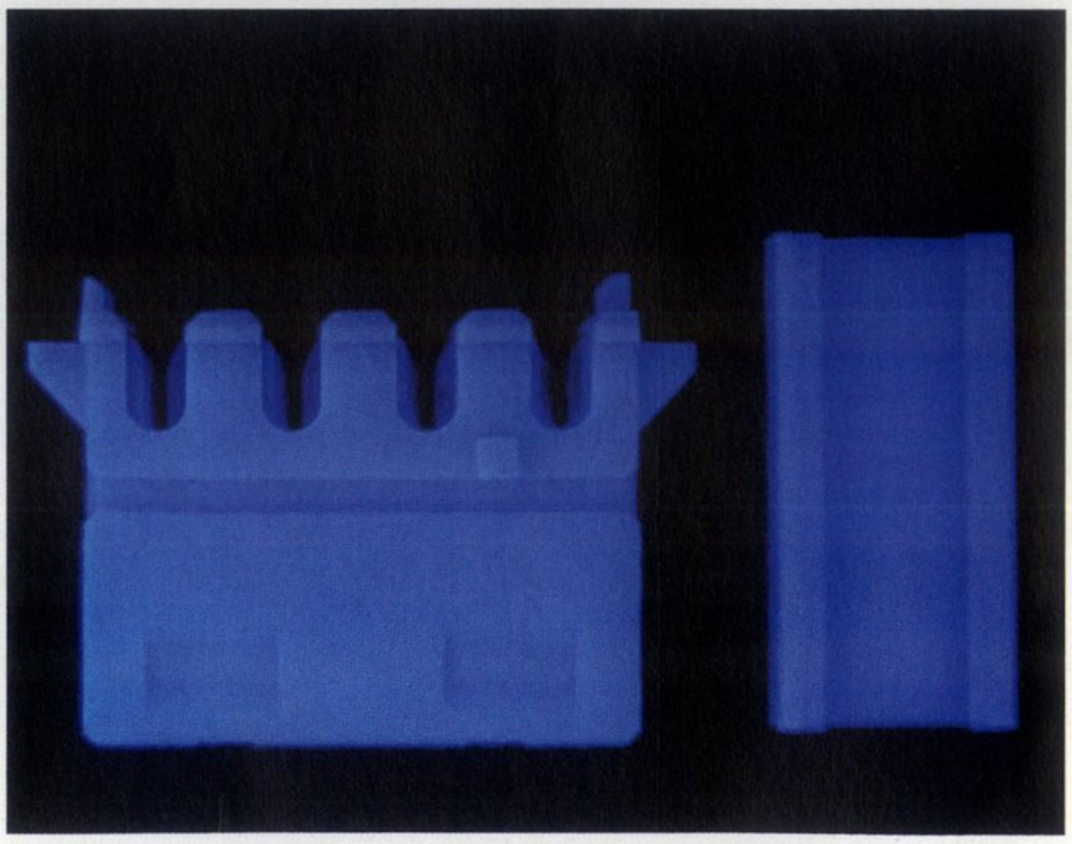


SELF CRIMPING 90 DEGREE MOLEX PLUGS

Price: $1.25
Distributor: PC Case Gear
Phone: (03) 9584 7266
PCGA Installation Rating: Average, have to know the voltages of PSU wires and a little finesse is required when crimping
PCGA Verdict: An even easier way to convert your machine into the ultimate mod-box. UV makes for some nice glow in the dark effects and the self-crimping plugs make the process much less of a chore.

As modding becomes more popular and companies run to jump on the bandwagon we're seeing the process of modding a machine become simpler. Such is the case with these self crimping UV reactive Molex plugs. Previously it took a fair amount of effort to change Molex plugs because it involved de-pinning the old plug and re-pinning the new UV one on.

As these are 90 degree plugs, they attach to the PSU differently. Instead of having to bring the wires in contact with a pin, you simply place the self-crimping plug over the 5V, 12V and two grounding wires (make sure you put it on the correct way around). Clipping the back plate of the Molex plug causes enough pressure to cut through the plastic coating of the wire and make contact. A breeze to install, these plugs are a real time saver and also worthy of mention are replacement Molex pins, both male and female, that are a great way of repairing a faulty plug or botched install.



PC GAMES addict

YOUR GUIDE TO THE HOT PC GAMES ADDICT MAY DISCS

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

A sneaky single-player demo with stealthy Sam

ON THE CDS

ON CD 1:

PLAYABLE DEMOS
Colin McRae Rally 04
Gangland
Splinter Cell:
Pandora Tomorrow
UFO: Alien Invasion

MOVIES
Advent Rising

PATCHES
Call of Duty 1.03 beta
Star Wars: KOTOR 1.03

ON CD 2:

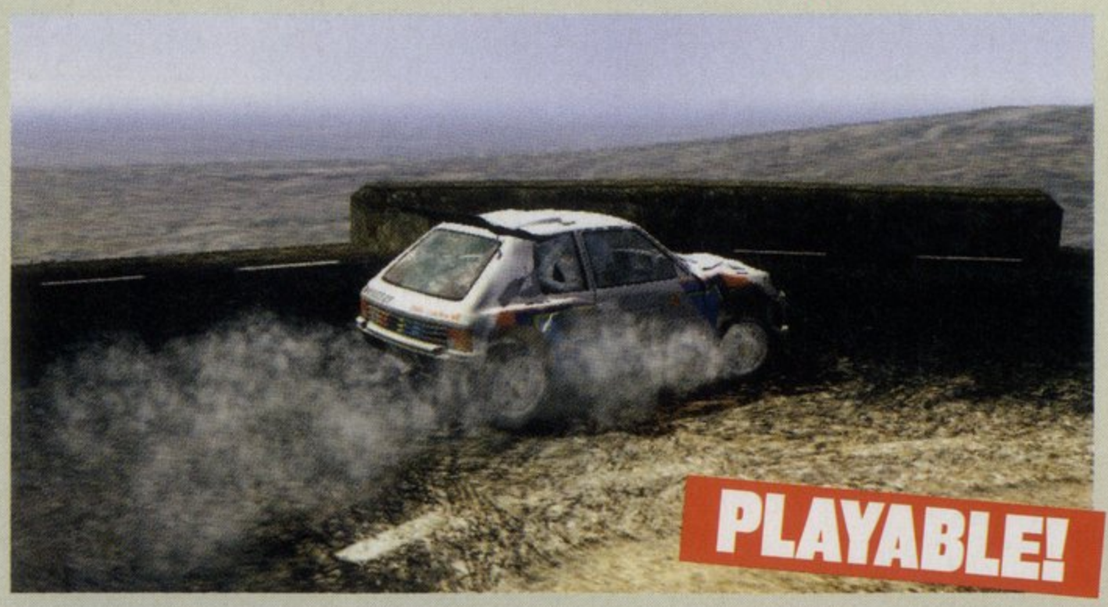
PLAYABLE DEMOS
Beyond Divinity
Desert Rats vs. Akrika Korps
Syberia II

MOVIES
The Evolution of Halo

DRIVERS
ATI Radeon Catalyst 4.3
nVidia Forceview update

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

Take this issue's hot new racer for a spin!



BEYOND DIVINITY

See if this RPG sequel truly surpassing the gods...

ON THE DVD

PLAYABLE DEMOS
18 Wheels of Steel
Beyond Divinity
Colin McRae Rally 04
Desert Rats vs. Akrika Korps
Far Cry - "Research"
Gangland
Joan of Arc
Kill Switch
Massive Assault
Nitro Family
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds
Saturday Night Speedway
Savage
Splinter Cell:
Pandora Tomorrow
Syberia II
UFO: Alien InvasionPacific
X2: The Threat

MOVIES
Advent Rising
Everquest II
Far Cry - Vehicles
The Evolution of Halo

PATCHES
Call of Duty 1.03 beta
Star Wars: KOTOR 1.03
Unreal II XMP Community
Bonus Pack
Worms 3D Service Patch 2

DRIVERS
ATI Radeon Catalyst 4.3
nVidia Forceview update

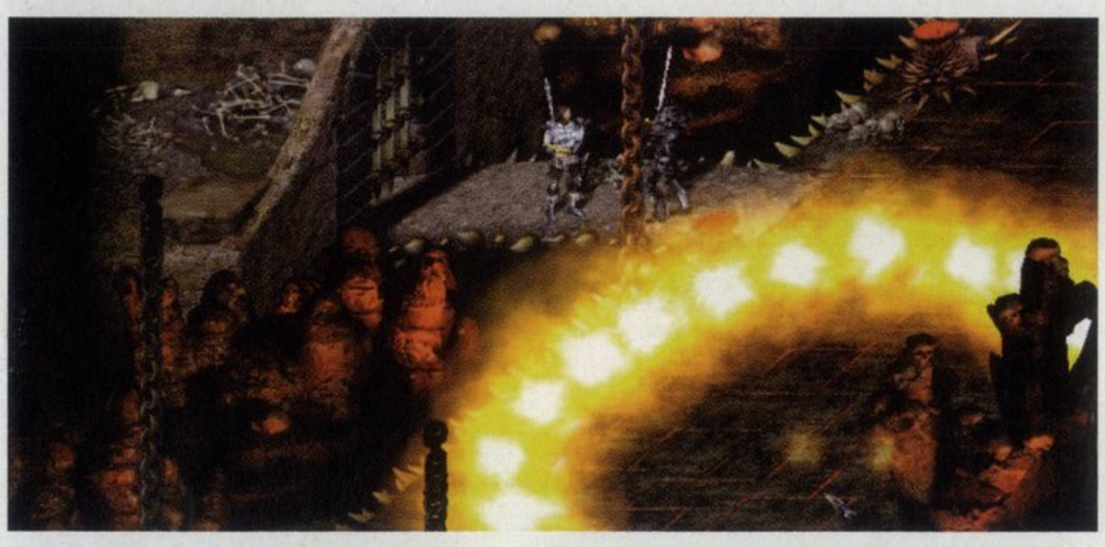
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

Developer: Codemasters
Publisher: Codemasters
Size: 152MB
Min Requirements: 750MHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

Back for another season is *Colin McRae Rally*, with an all-new physics engine, visual effects and a more complete set of options and modes.

Pushing towards a more realistic rally experience there the full game now boasts 34 different surfaces and 19 tyres types. Multiplayer options will allow for up to eight players to play in both competitive modes and also co-operative team events. See this issue's review for more details.

Demo Featues:
This demo features three of the forty-eight stages on offer in the final release, which may not sound like much, although that should be more than enough to see how the fourth instalment of this series looks on your machine.



BEYOND DIVINITY

Developer: Larian Studios
Publisher: CDV Software
Size: 168MB
Min Requirements: 233MHz CPU, 64MB RAM, 8MB video card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

Beyond Divinity is the follow-up to last year's RPG release *Divine Divinity*, that offered a non-linear sort of spin on the *Diablo* style of RPG.

The major move forward for the game is the introduction of total party combat, but the most impressive feature appears to remain in how much your character can be custom-worked to your liking.

It may lack the visual razzmatazz of some other RPGs, but our only genuine fear with this demo is that the questionable voice acting in there is likely to be final.

SYBERIA II

Developer: Microids
Publisher: Microids
Size: 82MB
Min Requirements: 350MHz CPU, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

Sequel to one of the better point and click adventures in recent years, *Syberia II* continues the adventure of Kate Walker as she chooses to loose herself in an eldritch and rather nippy fantasy land. Old-school adventuring, new-school graphics.

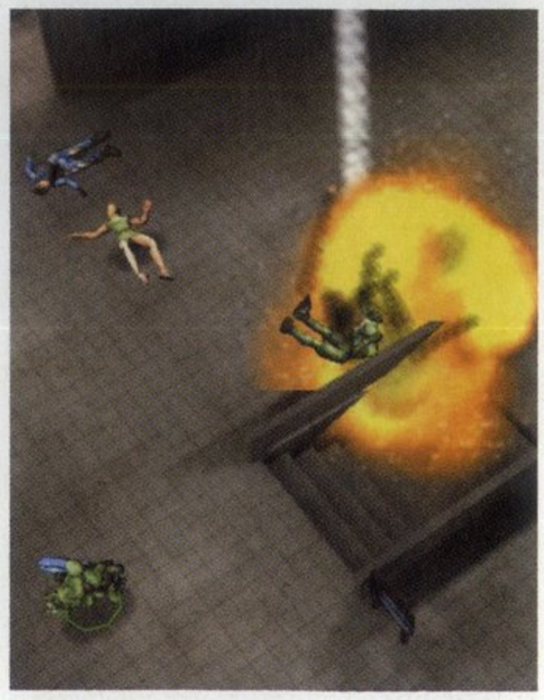
ESSENTIAL PATCHES

STAR WARS: KOTOR v1.03
The force may be strong with this one, but it still needs some patching here and there. The major fix here will benefit owners of ATI video cards, with the added detection for Soft Shadows support. A little bit of the dark side.

CALL OF DUTY 1.03 (beta)
With EAX 3.0 support and a host of bug fixes, this is an essential patch (the 1.03 final patch was released just prior to publication). Most noteworthy of the bug fixes is that players leaning around corners can now be seen by the people they can see. Head down soldier!

UFO: ALIEN INVASION

Developer: UFOAI Team
Publisher: TBA
Size: 27.8MB
Min Requirements: If you can't run this, why on earth are you reading this magazine?!
There's not too much to say about *UFO: Alien Invasion* other than it's the most blantantly *X-Com* inspired game we've ever seen. That's not really a bad thing though, and this demo shows us all that the *Quake 2* engine is still alive and kicking!



Advent Rising Movie

Developer: GlyphX
Publisher: Majesco
Size: 55MB

An extremely long look at gameplay footage from *Advent Rising*, a 1st/3rd person action adventure with a strong focus on combat. Note the targeting system that allows for a very cinematic kind of battle.

EVOLUTION OF HALO MOVIE

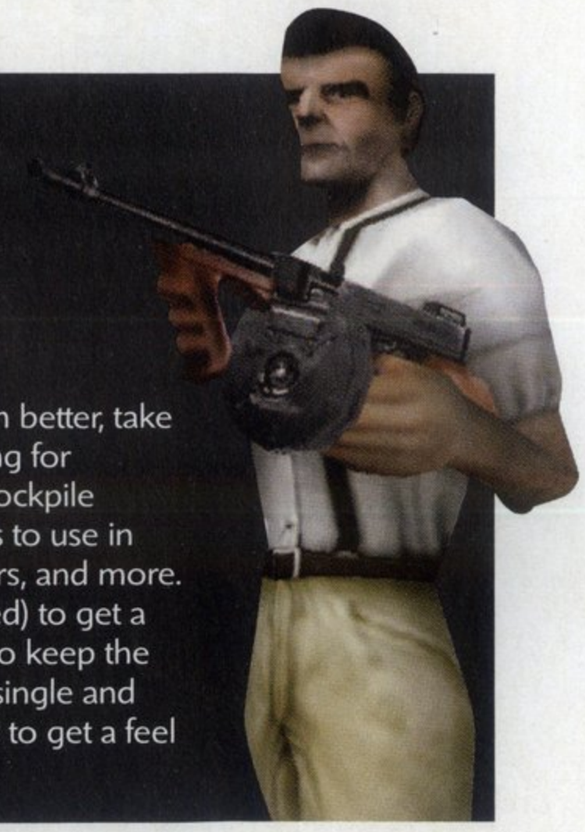
Did you know that Halo wasn't always going to be the first-person shooter that everyone so eagerly awaited. We'll let the dev-team from Bungie explain it all with their voice overs throughout this lengthy tale of the making of a game.

Gangland

Developer: MediaMobsters Publisher: Whiptail Size: 121MB ./ 124 MB
Min Requirements: 600MHz CPU, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

Apparently crime pays plenty, so long as you're able to hack it running a serious organisation that takes no prisoners and know how to control its turf. That's the premise behind *Gangland*, a mobster-themed game that involves everything from strategically making deals, to taking control of the action down on street level, in a living, breathing 3D city.

Collect money from local business with a bit of encouragement, or even better, take out the goons who are collecting for opposing gangs. Hire goons, stockpile weapons and other implements to use in your bid to make the town yours, and more. There's even the chance (or need) to get a respectable relationship going to keep the head of the family happy. Both single and multiplayer demos are included to get a feel for all aspects of play.



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Developer: Ubisoft
Publisher: Ubisoft
Size: 118MB
Min Requirements: 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

This single player demo starts with a mission aboard a moving train, where Sam needs to extract information from a contact without alerting terrorists controlling the train.

A second mission involves infiltrating a cave complex riddled with armed guards. It's more free form, and lets the player get a grip of efficient stealth and combat.

Although there ' s nothing of the multi-player aspects here, this demo serves as a perfect example of how the next premiere stealth-sim will run on your PC. Be sure not to snoop around with night vision on all the time or you ' ll miss out on some of the incredible lighting and shadowing effects.

DESERT RATS VS. AFRIKA KORPS

Developer: Digital Reality
Publisher: Encore
Size: 209MB
Min Requirements: 1GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

RTS wargaming meets the pause taxtics of *Baldur's Gate* in *Desert Rats vs. Akrika Korps*. In the single-player game there are two campaigns, each narrated by a war hero of from the British and German forces.

This multiplayer demo features one four-player map, Conquer 1, Multiplayer modes include Occupy all HQs, Kill All Enemies and Occupy 5 HQs. Gamespeed is variable with + and -, but don ' t forget to use pause if you want your forces to react to everything as quickly as you'd want them to..

INSIDE VALVE!

HALF-LIFE 2

Wondering where it's gone? So were we. Next month, everything you want to know: when, how, why and how big. Only in PC GAMES ADDICT!

NEW ESSENTIAL DEMOS
V8 SUPERCARS 2
HITMAN: CONTRACTS
SPLINTER CELL
BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

EXCLUSIVE

PIRATES!

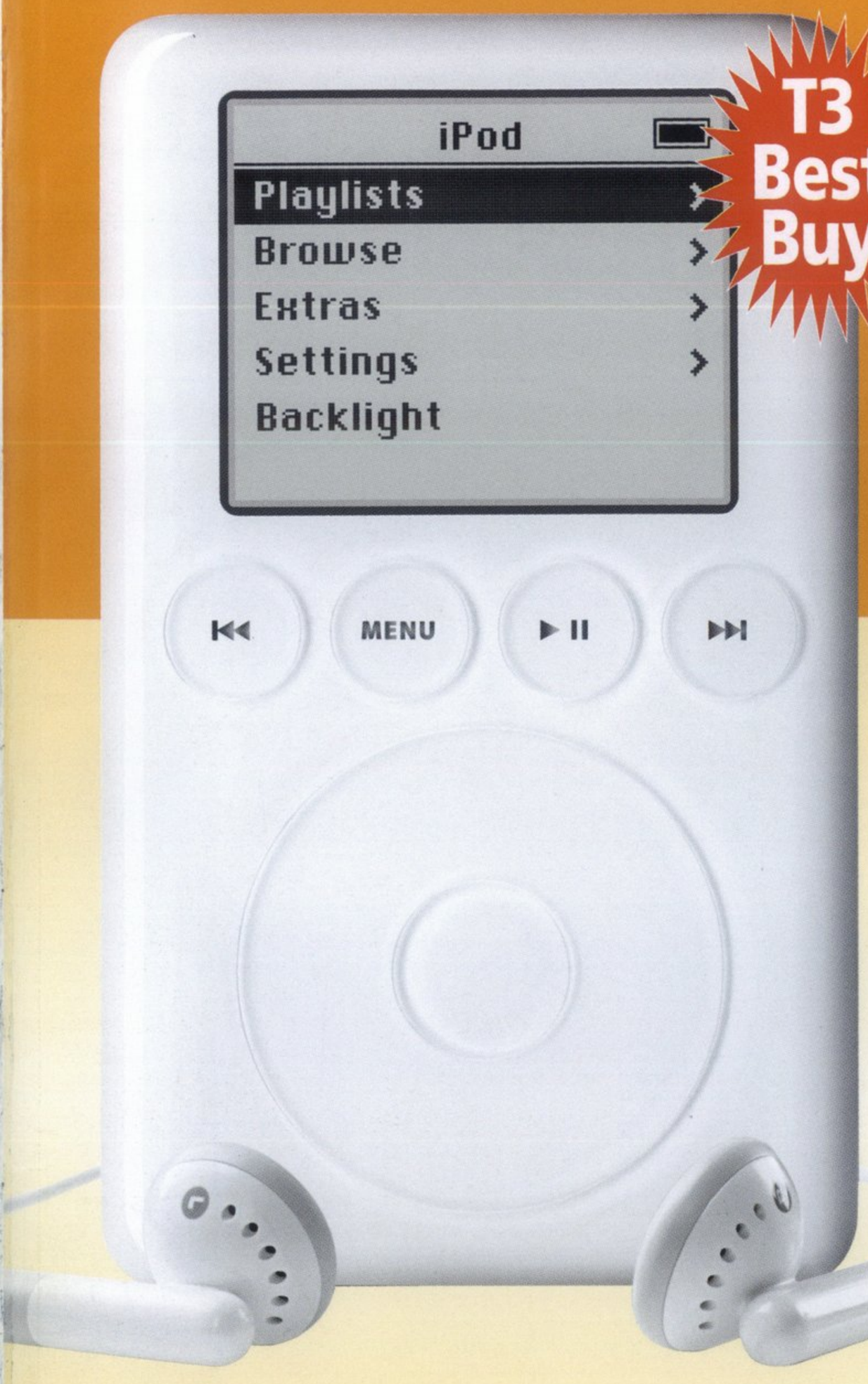
Sid Meier's hard at work remaking one of his classics. The ships, the swordfights – we get the scoop.

REVIEWED BREED, TOCA RACE DRIVER 2, GANGLAND, LORDS OF THE REALM 3, HITMAN: CONTRACTS AND MORE...

PREVIEWED BLACK & WHITE 2, STALKER, EVIL GENIUS, FOOTBALL MANAGER, FLATOUT, VAMPIRE, NEXUS, MIDWAY, DRAGON EMPIRES AND MORE...

DON'T MISS THE MAY ISSUE OF PC GAMES ADDICT – ON SALE THURSDAY 19TH MAY

All magazine contents and gifts subject to change. Some gifts not available overseas.



T3 Best Buy

iPod.

Described by T3 Magazine as "the best MP3 player in the world"! The iPod, now for Mac and PC, can hold up to 10,000 tracks, is simple and easy to use, and oh so cool.

Do *more* with your iPod

Griffin iTrip FM Transmitter

Listen to your iPod through any FM radio. Ideal for in the car!

T3 Best Buy

Griffin PowerPod Car Charger

Don't let your iPod run out of juice on those big trips. The PowerPod uses your car's cigarette lighter socket to keep your iPod fully charged.

Belkin Tunedok

Put the Tunedok in to your car's cup holder for easy mounting of the iPod in your car.

Belkin Media Reader for iPod

Free up room on your Digital Camera's memory card by transferring your photos to your iPod. Ideal when you're away from your computer.

Griffin iTalk Voice Recorder for iPod

Plug the iTalk into the top of your iPod and suddenly you have a world-class voice recorder with literally thousands of hours of recording time.

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Protect and funk up your iPod with an iSkin silicone skin. Includes screen protector and belt clip.

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